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Screen

**Brecht and the Cinema/Film and Politics
Transcript of the 1975 Edinburgh Film Festival Brecht Event**

SIXGUNS AND SOCIETY

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Will Wright

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1 'The Searchers'

The first in a new series of Weekend schools organised by the Society for Education in Film and Television will be held in London from March 19 to 21, 1976.

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Editorial

Screen v 16 n 2, Summer 1975, contained a number of articles expounding, and defending against criticism, an approach, or rather a variety of related approaches, to the use of concepts deriving from psychoanalysis in the study of film. In the Editorial to that number it was noted that not all the Editorial Board was convinced of the value of those approaches and that exposition. In this number of *Screen*, four members of the Board present a more extended articulation of that critical position.

In the Summer of 1975, at the invitation of the Edinburgh International Film Festival, the Editorial Board of *Screen* organised a set of screenings and discussions at the Festival on the topic 'Brecht and Cinema/Film and Politics'. Our aim was to attempt to deal with three areas of problems: first, Brecht's own interventions in the cinema; second, more recent attempts at a political cinema critical of its own means of representation; and third, the actual and potential impact of Brecht on cinema and television in Britain. Twelve films were selected for viewing, four in each section, and two were shown as part of the Festival each afternoon during the week of the event; the next morning a paper was presented on the problems raised by the event as a whole but with particular reference to the films shown the previous afternoon (drafts of the papers or summaries had previously been distributed), and there followed an hour's discussion of the paper and the films among the participants in the event, averaging about eighty per session and drawn from some sixty who had subscribed specially for the event and the hundred delegates and press representatives recognised by the Festival. After the discussions there was a dramatised reading from Brecht's *Messingkauf Dialogues* in three parts performed for subscribers by the CO-AX theatre company under the direction of Pete Mathers. Finally, the event took advantage of the presence of Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet at the Festival to conduct a question-and-answer session with them, under the chairmanship of Martin Walsh.

Most of this issue of *Screen* is devoted to an edited transcript

- 4 of the papers and discussions at the Brecht event. They are offered to our readers because while the papers deepen and extend the terms of the theses on Brecht's relevance-for the cinema introduced in *Screen* v 15 n 2, the discussions clarify the difficulties and contradictions implicit in those theses. The papers are presented here more or less as they were read, with a few cuts and stylistic improvements, but no alterations of substance. The discussions, have, of course, been heavily edited and cut from transcripts of tape recordings made of the sessions. Our aim in this editing has been to represent all the points of view expressed at the event and to cover all the main arguments that ran through the discussions. Since it was impossible to check all the edited versions of contributions with their authors, not all of whom could be ascertained from memory or the tapes anyway, all contributions other than those by the central organisers of the Event (Ben Brewster, Stephen Heath, Claire Johnston, Alan Lovell, Colin MacCabe, Pete Mathers, James Pettifer, Martin Walsh and Paul Willemen), which are marked by name or initials, are unnamed; we can only apologise in advance to anyone who feels their views have been misrepresented, and especially to those whose contributions have been omitted for lack of space. In marking contributions with letters from the alphabet (letters which do not, incidentally, distinguish the sex or nationality of the speaker), we have as far as possible preserved the same letter for the same person throughout.

Finally I should express our gratitude to some of the people without whose help neither the event nor this transcript would have been possible: to the Director of the Festival, Lynda Myles, the Edinburgh International Film Festival Council and the Festival staff at Film House for providing the whole organisational infrastructure; to the Traverse Theatre Club for the venue for most of the discussions, the use of their bar and facilities for the *Messingkauf Dialogues* production; to the members of CO-AX for that production; to the Goethe Institute and various departments of the British Film Institute for making prints of a number of the films available and for enabling the organisers to study them before the event; to John Caughie and Peter Gidal for the tapes of the discussions from which this transcript has been made; and finally to all those who subscribed, watched the films and contributed to the discussions.

BEN BREWSTER

The Limits of Naturalism

(on *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück* and *Kuhle Wampe*)

James Pettifer

'Zille gives penury a smack on the bottom' – Theodor Adorno
I wish first to refer selfcritically to my paper on *Kuhle Wampe* contained in the Summer 1974 (v 15 n 2) issue of *Screen*. There are a number of relevant points. In the paper I did not offer a reading of the film as such, but attempted to outline the historical determinations on which the film was based. This approach seemed to me to be necessary in view of the largely mythical element in most of what was previously written about the film, in which it was seen as the product of a magical new conception, the virgin birth of an exemplary new art. I put forward the view that the film was exceptionally heavily determined by the exigencies of the class struggle at the time and in particular that this determination took place on a terrain dominated by the catastrophic effects of the world economic crisis on the traditional patterns of German working class life. I also said that in the conditions that existed at the time, many Marxists working within film as elsewhere, were open to the influences of petty-bourgeois ideology, and that these mostly took the form of ultra-left utopian idealism about the nature of the working class that supported the KPD, the German Communist Party. Twelve months later, I find that this approach and the reading it implied led to too great an influence of sociological factors and inadequate articulation of the revolutionary position of the film and the deeply positive formal character it possesses. I intend in this paper to indicate these positive characteristics by means of a comparison, on the basis of the *gest* and the episode, with aspects of Jutzi's *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück*.

It should be borne in mind that *Mutter Krause* was perhaps at the culmination, in quality and scope, of a series of attempts to create a German proletarian film. The earlier works of Lamprecht, in particular *Die Verrufenen*, made in 1925, have similar themes and settings in the slum life of industrial North Berlin. And *Kuhle Wampe* has a close relationship insofar as both it and *Mutter Krause* can be said to show the misery of the people and that a political force exists, the KPD, that is struggling to unite the people

6 to overthrow the degraded world in which they live. Each film has a strong basis in the family drama, of the decline and fall of the family as an important unit of social relations. In each as a result of circumstances, a young proletarian woman is drawn into the revolutionary movement. Each contains a wedding celebration. Each contains an important suicide of a proletarian figure. But in *Mutter Krause*, the effect of the film is ultimately reactionary, despite moving representations of the misery of the workers' lives, because the text is blocked at the point of a precise naturalism, of static reproduction of the given reality. I believe the reason for this blockage, and the absence of it in *Kuhle Wampe*, although many of their themes are similar, is the result of the absence of the located Brechtian *gest** and the consequent absence of epic break-ages in the discourse and lack of distance.

It is not necessary to dwell unduly on the significance of the earlier naturalist films, nor on their dominant ideology, stemming in the Weimar Republic from the humanist positions taken up by Heinrich Mann after World War I. In the cases of the Lamprecht films and *Mutter Krause* the exposition of the locale of the Berlin slums and scenes of misery within them is supposed to induce within the audience the desire to see these conditions changed. The object of *Kuhle Wampe* is not merely, as at the end of *Mutter Krause* to show that a political force exists – the German Communist Party – which seeks the end of capitalism but to show the methods by which class consciousness is changed to achieve that end.

In this context *Mutter Krause* is a continuous narrative, in which at the beginning of the film a manuscript, by Heinrich Zille, the Berlin cartoonist, is shown, which describes conditions in Wedding. Many of the frames in the film are linked to, or based on Zille drawings. To this extent, the choice of incidents and characters has been heavily determined by an acute observation of the picturesque. In the precise naturalism the text has been engendered by the authority of a pre-existing prose text – indicated by the use of the initial Zille text – as evidence in writing offered to the audience of that reality of the misery in the material sphere. The use of the Zille-method, for *Mutter Krause* was not the only film of the time based upon it, leads to a concentration upon areas of working class life available to a visitor, a guest in the milieu. In this respect some of the most important areas are as follows: 1. the interior of the home; 2. the street; 3. the pub and dance hall; 4. the countryside around Berlin. In terms of the establishment of authority the contrast with the beginning of *Kuhle Wampe* is instructive, in that prose writing is shown, but in a dynamic in the montage system representing the objective historical situation, the

* For a discussion of the Brechtian notion of *gest*, see Colin MacCabe's paper, p 49 below.

newspapers showing the employment prospects for the working class and the catastrophic rise in the jobless figures caused by the world economic crisis. Thus *Kuhle Wampe* at once seeks an analytic attitude in the audience, whereas in the beginning of *Mutter Krause* the proposed discourse is that of confirmation of the authority of an existing written prose text composed by an individual 'expert' observer, Heinrich Zille. There is no contradiction in the film between the reality of Zille's text and the construction of the film. In *Kuhle Wampe* the whole film is devoted to showing how the struggles of the people can induce productive contradiction in German society during the crisis. The system of signification in *Mutter Krause* is in practice governed in the sphere of ideology by a harmonising principle based on the thematic exposition of the unvarying misery of the class; in the relations to the aesthetic theory of Naturalism it can perhaps be compared with the SPD dogma of the inevitable pauperisation of the proletariat. In film terms this gives an apparently timeless quality to many aspects of *Mutter Krause*. It is often possible for Jutzi to establish the gest with varying degrees of effectiveness insofar as a diagrammatic representation of the class position of the Mother herself is made, for example, by the action of her measuring a few spoons of coffee parsimoniously into the pot, but the gest is not effectively located within any particular external context of a general character. A further example of this problem might be Paul's finding of a humming top – a gest of discovery during his work on the rag and bone tip. The effect in practice is confined to the creation of a limited degree of empathy and pathos, rather than the shock of recognition of work in that situation which results in the discovery of a useful object in a workers' family.

In passing we can note the associations of this locale – Baudelaire's poem concerning ragpickers and Benjamin's location of this activity within the process of capitalist development and his analysis of the modes of social perception involved.

Within the wider context of the construction of the whole text of *Mutter Krause* the lack of conscious filmic organisation based on the gest is indirectly reflected in the use of montage that is adopted. Whereas the social world of proletarian life in *Wedding* is initially indicated by a diverse series of unsteady images showing firstly drunks and beggars then tenements, finally focussing on a window, the camera work here underlying the mode of perception I have outlined already, the montage sequence offers contrasting frames of Mutter Krause and Paul collecting payment for her newspapers and Erna and her boyfriend Max bathing in the countryside. The important gests involved in the collection of the newspaper revenue are located in images outside society and the material world of the crisis of capitalism, and placed in contradiction to leisure in the 'innocent' natural world of the countryside. The escape of the former is matched by the production of escape in

8 the latter when following this segment, Paul drinks all her money away in the pub.

A useful comparison can be made on aspects of material life as they are represented in the two films. Culinary and liquid excess is articulated in *Kuhle Wampe* as a specifically petty-bourgeois phenomenon connected with a type of collective celebration and shown in the wedding party. In *Mutter Krause* it is a perpetual daily escape in the sense that drink was in the nineteenth century. In *Kuhle Wampe* the various gestures of consumption shown at the wedding party are located precisely, within a pattern of petty-bourgeois influences on the proletariat, part of which is represented, at least in Anni and Fritz's view, in the actual institution of the party itself. As such a precise and limited political point is made by the junction of the gesture with the objective reality rather than a generalised moralistic condemnation. In *Mutter Krause* although there is no doubt about Jutzi's negative standpoint towards what is shown, there is not even the sloganising link that there is, say, in temperance propaganda, where the brewers are made the scape-goats for the evils of man.

The degree to which the misery of the proletariat is seen to be static and timeless is reflected in the difficulty Jutzi finds in showing a number of contradictions within the working class itself, in particular between the lodger and Mutter Krause's family. The later development in *Kuhle Wampe* of the revolt of the young Bönikes against the resignation of their parents is of vital importance in developing the last two anecdotal episodes in which the positive alternative of the KPD is shown. The gestures of the liberation of Anni, in that she liberates herself before Fritz, are developed in the context of the location of her work in the electrical factory, of her integration in the prevailing processes of material production. The construction of the montage sequence in which Anni's reactions to her pregnancy are indicated shows the dialectical relationship whereby she, as a worker, a producer of surplus value for capital, herself becomes a producer in the biological sphere, and how Brecht's expressed view that the relationship of nurture between mother and child is the central frustrated relationship under capitalism is expressed. The precision employed in the choice of objects shown, the commodities required by the mother under capitalism and the actualisation of bourgeois cinema of the image of the lover in the UFA film poster are exactly contradictory elements expressed within the frames. Against this degree of antagonistic contradiction expressed in the montage sequence, the basis for her revolt against so-called 'natural' family life is made clear to the audience.

In *Mutter Krause* the problem is handled differently; the intervention of political consciousness in the discourse comes earlier, and is once again connected with the assertion of the authority of a written prose text. Erna's boyfriend Max is already a socialist

before he enters the film, so to speak. When Erna visits his room, she makes two separate but related gests. The first of these is to straighten the picture of Marx on the wall and comment that it needs dusting. Its inference is that of the role of woman in steady-ing and reinforcing the pattern of Max's 'ideals'. It is a gest in the private sphere and limited to it, indicating the iconographic nature of his relationship to the Marxist discourse. The father-figure implications are obvious. Her second gest is to help him to tidy his books; after finding a joke device in a book, Max offers her 'Women in the Social Struggle'. The gest is located in an area in which the discourse of political struggle consists of 'Great Books' which are passed on from the conscious man to the unconscious woman. It is not a living political discourse in the way that the arguments about coffee in the last anecdote of *Kuhle Wampe* are part of a living discourse. There is in fact no discussion about politics whatsoever in *Mutter Krause*. This means that the actions of Erna in joining the workers' demonstration take on an unreal character based on a code of semi-mythical transformation.

In this context it can be noted that the film possessed some of its negative political qualities resulting from its inability to transcend the limits of naturalism in its resemblance to some later Soviet films based on the Socialist Realist aesthetic. The characters are typical, in the Lukácsian sense, and a schematic reading of the screenplay would conceal the pessimistic character of the film and show that it had a positive hero, Erna. Merely to state that such a reading could possibly be made indicates the poverty of the Socialist-Realist concepts and the near necessity to adhere to naturalistic means of representation to secure adherence to them. The image/fetish relationship that has been seen in the gest concerning Marx's picture is paralleled in the segments associated with Mutter Krause's brooch. The brooch with the man's face on it will not raise enough money at the pawnshop to pay the newspaper bill. When the first transactions with the newspaper money are seen earlier in the film they are opposed to the images of innocent leisure in the countryside. At this, her final hour, the image/fetish is that of the dead husband, Paul's father, which is later found by him when he is in the process of breaking the law. The brooch leads directly to their capture, as the noise of Paul breaking into the cabinet to secure it disturbs the pawnbroker. This final segment of the text would clearly form an anecdotal episode were the text to be constructed on anything like a Brechtian basis.

It forms a sequence of action that does not depend on the 'eternal' images of the home and the pub, but involves the oppressed taking anarchistic action – for such is crime to the proletariat – in order to create a new situation and extract goods from their oppressors. They are no longer passive victims of circumstance. But the filmic text is tied to the fetish of the passed-

10 on brooch and no effort is made to avoid sentimental empathy at the transference of it, a mythical expropriation. The 'Grundgest' of the burglary that covers the whole segment is not related to any particular historically determined social formation. It is generalised into an abstract lashing out of the desperate against the system. The object of their attack is not located socially. The limits of the naturalist milieu-work of Zille and Jutzi is evident here; the pawnshop is so marginal to the process of exchange and circulation in modern capitalism that it has to be shown isolated within the frame, and in a welter of semi-mythological allusions to the oppression of the working class.

What then, is fundamentally different in the way that *Kuhle Wampe* is constructed, in the way in which the gests and the elements are located that is effectively a break with the problematic of naturalism? This should at first be approached by the simple thesis that *Kuhle Wampe* is a demonstrative narrative and hence analytical, whereas *Mutter Krause* is descriptive. *Kuhle Wampe* postulates an audience as a twice separated element, not merely distanced from empathetic affects in the orthodox way, but itself becoming separated by discussion within itself about questions raised in the film. It is in particular an already politicised audience and the film seeks clarification of issues within it. This is not made so explicit as in the *Lehrstücke* of the same period, where in say *Die Mutter* a distinct line is drawn between the Social Democrats and the Communists. This is mainly in my view, due to problems of censorship. We have seen that gests, as in the case of the Anni-motherhood segment, are closely related to an objective social and economic world. The overall construction of the segments reflects this control logic; the songs contain the subjective contradictions that the situation has given rise to, but they are not conveyed by the individual expressive subject, thus Helene Weigel sings 'Das Frühjahr' while Anni and Fritz are walking through the forests. Eisler's music itself undergoes a degree of distanciation from the visual text, although this application is uneven in practice. There is perhaps greater separation in the shots of nature than in the opening montage sequence where the music comes close to being the abstract embodiment of Fate that Brecht deplored in bourgeois art.

The pattern of demonstration is governed by a process of temporal development that is not linked to the unity of consciousness of any one character, as opposed to *Mutter Krause* where the time of the Mother's life effectively becomes the time of the whole film. In *Kuhle Wampe* there are a number of separate temporalities that exist in unstable relationships. They are linked, in general, to the three groups of workers who are seen by Brecht, Dudow and Ottwalt, namely, the desperate, like the young Bönike, the resigned, like the Bönike parents, and those prepared to struggle like Fritz and Anni. Thus the epic character of the film

does not reside simply in the self-contained character of the episodes, where the timing of events is not dominated by a linear narrative causality derived from the characters' psychological states, but in the fact that the anecdotes themselves have different relations to time and hence to history and politics. The problematic of the temporality of suicide is demonstrated and exhausted in the verbal text, insofar as the old woman, after young Bönike's death, comments 'Such a young man. He still had the best years of his life before him.' The time of nature exists in contradiction to the young man's choice of his own historical time, that of his death. 11

The cuts made by the censors, in particular in their obscuring of the revolt of Anni against her family and in her relationships with Fritz and the revolutionary movement indicate the external relations of the 'Grundgest' in the episodes to the overall time of the workers' struggle. The three reasons the film was cut were: 1. it offended the dignity of President Hindenburg; 2. it cast slurs on the administration of justice; 3. it attacked religion. These refer to: 1. the fact that the emergency decree cutting the dole is made to appear the reason for young Bönike's suicide; 2. the attack on current methods of eviction and Fritz's indifference to the abortion laws; 3. the frames of naked youth swimming while church bells rang.

The first two of these indicate clearly the profound truth of Brecht's comments to the effect that the police understood the film better than the critics, as the nature of the aesthetic effect created by the film was such that in general the relation of the gestic and episodes to the political reality of the late Weimar Republic was sufficiently precise to enable it to be judged by the agents of the state apparatus on the basis of the class consciousness it had the capacity to create amongst its audiences. As such I would regard it as an exemplary filmic intervention of particular interest when there still may be said to be a campaign to be conducted against conventional means of representation and their influence in the cinema.

Discussion

A: Don't you think there's a problem in that the numbers attending this seminar have been restricted to seventy? Aren't we just going to be a small clique discussing abstract theoretical questions, when for Brecht what mattered was always contact with the masses, with the largest possible number?

- 12 Stephen Heath: Brecht was not concerned simply to reach the largest possible number. For him, the problem of the masses was not a quantitative one, but one of a particular class structure defining certain types of intervention as possible; the numbers involved depend on what is appropriate for the type of intervention concerned. Thus, the *Lehrstücke*, the didactic plays involved very few people, the actors only; they were not really meant to be performed before an audience at all and if an audience was present, the effect on the actors was still the crucial thing. If it's possible to have a progressive effect on however few people with this seminar form, then one is bound in carrying it out to respect the limits of that form, and one of those is a limit to the size at which the form can be effective; we may well have exceeded the optimum with the present numbers.

B: In his original summary, James Pettifer refers to Brecht's move from nihilism towards a Marxist world view. In the light of this development, isn't there a great danger in holding *Kuhle Wampe* up as a model as he has done in his paper, for it too can be regarded as an immature work, dominated by an agitational conception of revolutionary art that Brecht transcended in his later parable plays? The concepts you have drawn on for the analysis of both films come from Brecht's later theoretical texts, especially the *Messingkauf Dialogues*, which would suggest a much more nuanced position on *Kuhle Wampe*, considering it in its place in the general development of Brecht's aesthetic in theory and practice.

Ben Brewster: A number of different answers could be suggested to that. First, the view of Brecht's development might be challenged. Two of the crucial concepts James used, *gest* and epic construction, date from the late 1920's in Brecht's work, well before *Kuhle Wampe*, and the third, distanciation or *Verfremdung*, though not verbally present until the late 1930's, is arguably present conceptually at least as far back as the *Notes on Mahagonny*; thus James' conceptual apparatus does not date from the 1940's. And at the end of his life Brecht himself regarded works written more or less at the same time as the work on *Kuhle Wampe* such as *Die Massnahme*, *The Measures Taken* as his most advanced achievements, precisely as the theatre of the future, not an outdated stage in his own development. Second, it seems to me that in this seminar our interest should not be in Brecht the author, as it were, in the establishment of a teleological structure, the Brechtian system, most adequately realised in the works of his maturity, with earlier works regarded both as deficient in respect of that mature system and already containing it in germ. Our question of *Kuhle Wampe* should not be, how Brechtian is it, but what sort of an intervention is it in a certain political and ideological conjuncture; the parable plays could then be judged in the same way, without placing them on a scale as more or less representative of Brecht's

mature position. Similarly, when we come on to the films of Godard, Oshima, Straub and so on, we should not measure them against a general Brechtian system but examine them, too, as interventions in very different ideological and political conjunctures from those Brecht had to deal with, and different from each other as well, to see if there is anything to be learnt from a comparison of these interventions with Brecht's and his reflections on them. 13

SH: I think that in moving round the problem of the role assigned to the woman in *Mutter Krause* the discussion has been touching on something which is important in helping us to focus the two films and the issues their conjuncture – the fact of seeing them together now – can lead us to pose. Obviously the situations of Erna and Anni have a certain similarity and equally obviously that similarity is taken up – and taken up filmically – in very different ways, ways directly in line with the image of society and the analysis that image contains and sustains in the two films. Erna's education comes through finally as a *carrying away*: the chance meeting with Max (at the fairground) opens up another world, another mentality, is a kind of surprise (the scene of the visit to Max's room is played on the model of a discovery, with a coy curiosity Erna moves from wonder to wonder, from Marx to the snake in the book) in which the necessity, for her, is less to understand than to follow (*Women in the Social Struggle* is no more really than a present, a token and a slogan; compare the scenes in *Kuhle Wampe* of the readers studying Hegel together, of the production of posters and tracts, of Kurt and Gerda deciding which pamphlet to buy, indicating one on contraception that they have already read). As though emblematically, when Erna joins the (all male) demonstration – again by chance (she needs to find Max) – she is literally carried away, borne along with her feet hardly touching the ground. By contrast, Anni's education is conscious and determined – by class, by generation, by the analysis of her class situation in its relations to her suitation as a young woman (and Anni, of course, is only one of the young women in the film). From the very start Anni is presented not as innocent of the world (Erna's *film* situation as victim, her *pathos*) but as without illusion as to her personal and social experience (remember her 'insolence' in the scene in the Bönike apartment just prior to her brother's suicide). She is not carried away; rather, the actual problems of her situation – which include sexual relations and forms of the definition of family life – lead to the confrontation of her experience with that of others and thence to a certain commitment. The relation of force between men and women in that commitment is to be not one of subordination (images of which the film focusses in the Mata Hari scene between Bönike and his wife, in the betrothal feast, in the bourgeois couples in the S-Bahn) but of an equality of difference in the shared class struggle: the commitment is to the

- 14 class struggle within which men and women may have and articulate specific problems (grasped, for instance, in the relation between Anni and Fritz). The two points at which the film *addresses* the audience (its spectators) are actually taken by women – the ironic scoring of the social gest of the suicide by the woman on the stairs who turns to the camera to state ‘One less unemployed’ and the close shot of Gerda making the final statement of non-submission before the workers leave the S-Bahn singing the ‘Solidarity song’. Here I want to come back to *Mutter Krause* and precisely to the sexual articulation of the film. What *Mutter Krause* continually engages in Erna is this pathos, this victimisation (pathos is a kind of release of sentiment – of sentimentality – round abjection). Think, for example, of the scene in which the Lodger is about to attempt to rape her while she sleeps (a scene which seems to figure in the film the actual rape committed earlier, outside the time of the film): a suspense and an emotion is set up and released, staged, round the simple situation (left without any real analytic function) of the sleeping girl, caught defenceless. The film seems constantly to slope onto and to be guided by this kind of exploitation – the Lodger and Max in conflict over Erna, the revelation of her lack of virginity at the Lodger’s wedding party, Max’s jealousy and departure, the re-statement of Erna’s innocence (Max convinced by the arguments of his friend), Erna and Max reconciled. I point to this because I think pathos extends over the film finally to be seen as its very mode. The staging of the attempted rape is repeated in the story of *Mutter Krause* with its appeal to emotion and suspense in such a way as to weaken its social pressure – misery builds up until the suicide but Mutter K might have been – could have been – saved if only Erna had spoken earlier to Max, if only they had not put off sorting out her affairs until tomorrow, locked as they are, ironically, in the happiness of their reconciliation. Suicide which comes at the beginning of *Kuhle Wampe* as a social fact which is contained in an analysis (that of the reel ‘One less unemployed’) here *ends* the film, a social fact invested as tragic, hinging somewhat on fate (if only . . .). The filmic definitions of the two suicides are indicative, I think, and they both turn on an object as focus of meaning. In *Kuhle Wampe* the young Bönike opens the window, carefully takes off his watch and pushes a pot of flowers out of the way. After he jumps, there is a closeup of the watch followed by a shot of workers pedalling away furiously on their cycles in search of work. As the censor told Brecht, ‘You have not depicted a human being, but rather a type, the consequences are of a *political* nature.’ The watch turns away – distances – runs back to the speed of the opening montage of papers with their account of the growth of unemployment, to the races through the streets, and so on. In *Mutter Krause*, the preparations for the suicide end with Mutter K taking down a bird cage and walking into camera with it and off to put the bird outside the

room before she turns on the gas – the bird cage turns us into a total involvement with the pathos of the particular scene as (tragic) climax of the film. The responses to the suicides confirm the opposition: Anni and Fritz push through the circle gathered round the young Bönike, look down, look up and look down again in straight recognition; Erna and Max discovered Mutter K as their personal tragedy. The pathos – the pathetic organisation – is, seems to be, the exact accompaniment of the naturalism described by James Pettifer. The poor are victims and they can be liberated by improvement in conditions (change in milieu) – the slogan in the demonstration is ‘Give us homes fit for men to live in’. The figuration of this is the bestiality of the fairground theatre: the Fat Lady tormenting the pitifully helpless man; the audience sits in passive enjoyment, Max pulls Erna away (the inversion of the image). The figuration in *Kuhle Wampe* is the Rote Sprachrohr, the agit theatre at the sports meeting; a critically enacted scene of concrete existence given and received for learning. There is no inverting, in *Kuhle Wampe*; instead a class consciousness which breaks across existing social forms, demands transformation in struggle. I apologise for having spoken so long but I just want to stress that in sketching this comparison my intention hasn’t been to ‘reject’ one film in favour of the other. James has drawn attention to the difficulties of the situation in which the films were made, to the advance represented by *Mutter Krause*, to its progressive features (my account left out a number of extremely interesting scenes – the fairground particularly I would like to analyse more closely). What it seemed worth trying to pull out at this moment from the conjuncture of the two was the problem of the narrative organisation of film which I take to be an immediately contemporary problem and one which we’ll doubtless encounter in different forms in our future discussions and viewings. How do you organise material filmically so as to demonstrate its gestural configurations? How do you tell stories without their becoming fictions? *Mutter Krause* seems to describe – the montage of the shots of streets and buildings (seen also in *Kuhle Wampe*) – and then pull into fictions – the melodrama. *Kuhle Wampe* with its acts, its construction of a social argument, its off-centering of any individual character, seems to avoid fictionalisation. That was what I wanted to say.

Brecht and the Film Industry**(on *The Threepenny Opera* film and *Hangmen Also Die*)*****Ben Brewster**

In 1930, Brecht's publisher signed a contract with Nero-Film AG for the latter to make a film adaptation of Brecht and Weill's stage success, *The Threepenny Opera*. Despite clauses in the contract guaranteeing Brecht and Weill's right to collaborate in the adaptation and a subsequent agreement between Brecht and the film company on the detailed arrangements for this collaboration, joint work soon broke down, Nero went ahead (with Tobis and Warner Brothers), and Brecht and Weill sued. The case was heard in November of that year. Brecht lost his action (though Weill won his) and then settled out of court with the film company rather than appeal. The film of *The Threepenny Opera*, directed by Pabst, was premiered in February of 1931.

In 1941 Brecht arrived in California and settled in Los Angeles, deriving most of his income until he left the USA in 1947 from work as an independent scriptwriter for the film industry. Early in 1942, he and the American, formerly German director Fritz Lang conceived a film story based on the recent assassination of Heydrich, the Reichsprotektor of German-occupied Czechoslovakia. When they had roughed out a treatment, Lang offered the story

* Quotations, information and concepts in this paper are drawn from the following sources:

Bertolt Brecht: *Gesammelte Werke in 20 Bänden*, Frankfurt-am-Main 1967, especially 'Der Dreigroschenprozess' in Vol 18, pp 139-209.

Bertolt Brecht: *Texte für Filme II Exposés, Szenarien*, Frankfurt-am-Main 1969, especially 'Die Beule', pp 329-45.

Bertolt Brecht: *Arbeitsjournal 1938-55* (two vols), Frankfurt-am-Main 1973.

The shooting script of *The Threepenny Opera* film in *Masterworks of the German Cinema*, introduced by Roger Manvell, London 1973, pp 179-276 (German text in BFI Library).

Bernard Edelman: *Le Droit saisi par la photographie (Éléments pour une théorie marxiste du droit)*, Paris 1973.

Filmkritik n 223, July 1975 (special issue on *Hangmen Also Die* containing Lang's response to Brecht's account in the *Arbeitsjournal*).

to Arnold Pressburger, who raised the money to make it into a film. A German-speaking American scriptwriter, John Wexley, was assigned to work out a shooting-script with Brecht, in consultation with Lang. Disappointed by Lang's advice as to the requirements of a Hollywood script, Brecht began to draft a second, so-called 'ideal' script with Wexley, which was never completed and has subsequently disappeared. Relations between Brecht and Wexley subsequently deteriorated. The final version of the script, totalling some 280 pages, was only just ready when Pressburger told Lang shooting must start within a week; Lang then independently cut the script to 190 pages and shot the film, which, despite these cuts, is, at 140 minutes, a long film by contemporary Hollywood standards. When the film was ready, Wexley demanded the full script credit, and was granted it after a hearing of the case before the American Screenwriters' Guild, so Brecht is only given a joint credit (with Lang) for the story. Hence it is not true, as has sometimes been claimed, that Brecht publicly dissociated himself from the film; on the contrary he was extremely indignant at Wexley's attempt to obtain full script credit and fought it as hard as he could. However, he says himself in his diary that this was mainly for career reasons – the better credit he obtained the more jobs would be available to him in the industry. Thus his struggle does not represent an endorsement of the film. The *Arbeitsjournal* Brecht kept in Hollywood in the 1940's shows that despite a certain amount of enthusiasm about the project during the early stages of drafting the script with Wexley, Brecht was deeply disappointed by the final 280-page script and by what he saw of the shooting. Even the title *Hangmen Also Die* he disliked – it was adopted because there were copyright problems with the original title *No Surrender* which he preferred, and his own favourite title, *Trust the People*, was never seriously considered.

So, in both cases, in Germany and America, we have a familiar story: the story of the poet and the industry, of the incompatibility of art and commerce. Tempted by money and the hope to try his talents in the new medium, the writer travels to Neu Babelsberg or Hollywood, only to have his work confiscated and distorted beyond recognition. Finally embittered, he takes his tormentors to court and loses. Would that he had resisted the blandishments of the market place! Or, alternatively, would that those in charge of the industry were culturally qualified to recognise and respect the artist's true worth! Perhaps this presentation is slightly caricatural, but such arguments certainly occur, and particularly in the way the story of *Hangmen Also Die* is given by left-wing writers, especially in Eastern Europe: its supposed incompatibility with the capitalist industry legitimises the notion of the creative genius and his masterpieces. But the hero of this story is Bertolt Brecht, who fought throughout his life in literary work and theory against the elevated notion of art and artist embodied in such

- 18 velleities. And in both clashes, Brecht left behind documents which show that in his relations with the film industry he rejected the conventional writer's position, was indeed concerned to reveal its nullity. Whether for all that he fully escaped it is a question I shall consider later. In 1931, he published in the series of his works collected under the title *Versuche* (Experiments) a long polemic, *Der Dreigroschenprozess* (The Threepenny Lawsuit) on the lawsuit and its press reception. In 1942, he recorded his work on *Hangmen Also Die* in his *Arbeitsjournal*, a record of his work, not simply a personal diary, compiled, if not for future publication, at least for future reference.

In undertaking the lawsuit in 1931, Brecht and Weill knew that they were taking up a contradictory position. As Brecht says:

'Our position in this lawsuit revealed great contradictions from the very beginning: before a court that even as we appealed to it we had no wish to recognise as a place of right, we were forced to seek our rights, and these were only available to us as rights to private property. Moreover, we saw straight away that even in this form we should not obtain those rights.'

They conceived the lawsuit as a social experiment designed to expose the illusions surrounding artistic production maintained and sustained in three domains: first, amongst the intelligentsia, the notion that the work of art is only authentic as the expression of an individual creative personality; second, in the domain of the courts, the support given this notion by making it the basis for the law guaranteeing the immaterial property of the individual artist while in practice this law is interpreted so that it cannot hinder the capitalist production of artistic commodities; and third, in the film industry itself, the toleration of this old notion of art to an extent that, while not preventing the production of saleable artistic commodities, does encourage its 'stupidities' in film-making and hinder the development of the quite different notion of art and quite different collective organisation of 'artistic' production present in germ in the capitalist cinema.

Brecht's contract with Nero gave him the right to collaborate in the preparation of the shooting script and to have final approval of the finished version before shooting. He arranged with the company to prepare an outline with Dudow and Neher and pass it on to the scriptwriters appointed by the company, Vaida and Lania, eventually joined by Balázs. Brecht, Dudow and Neher wrote their outline (*Die Beule* or 'The Welt') and Brecht communicated the first part of it to Lania orally. The scriptwriters wrote up these scenes. Brecht then gave them the rest of the outline, which deviated much more from the stage version. The company then

broke off the writing and offered to buy Brecht out of his right to collaborate. He refused, the company went ahead with its own script, and Brecht sued. The court rejected Brecht's suit essentially on three grounds: that transferring a play to the film medium requires radical adaptation, and the writer must accept the firm's expert advice on how this is to be done; that the firm had contracted to make a film of a stage success and justifiably wanted to make the film in time to cash in on that success, so even Brecht's quite short running over deadlines (only a few days in one case) constituted a serious breach of contract on his part; that the changes Brecht wanted to introduce constituted the outline as a different work from the stage success, and hence also encroached on assumed terms in the original contract which would have enabled the firm to exploit the success of the stage version – ie in signing the contract the firm was guaranteed a script recognisably close to the original opera. 19

Brecht argues that this judgement shows that the courts in a capitalist society, as a superstructure of a capitalist-dominated economy, have to interpret the law in such a way as to ensure the ability of capital to make a profit: that is, they cannot operate in such a way as to interfere vitally with the production of commodities. On the other hand, they must carry out this interpretation within a legal tradition dominated by the notion of private property, in artistic matters defined by the property rights of an individual author on his personal creation, his immaterial property rights. The potential contradictions between these two factors can usually be easily resolved: the author's rights are alienable, like all property rights, and can therefore simply be bought by capital. Brecht cites the case of the architect who sued a hotel owner for changing the façade of the hotel the architect has designed for him; he won the action, that is, the right, not to restore the original façade, but to damages for the affront to his immaterial rights, his creative personality.

In the end, this was the solution reached in the Threepenny Lawsuit, though, as Brecht says, the firm settled financially rather than fighting the case through the higher courts not so much because it feared that the first judgement would be overthrown, but because it wanted to go ahead as fast as possible with the production of the film but was reluctant to do so with a lawsuit still hanging over its head. However, Brecht and Weill pushed the court into something close to an admission that the production of films is itself a collective activity and hence incompatible with a system of law based on notions of individual creativity.

So far, the analysis might be acceptable to those who argue that art and commerce are incompatible; as Nero Film's lawyer said at

20 the trial: 'All honour to the writer who refuses to allow his work to be filmed.' Brecht, however, argued on the contrary that in a capitalist society all art of any consequence, including literature, is produced as commodities and only obtains an audience via the market, and that the new apparatuses, radio and film, collective in production as well as distribution, open up possibilities of 'artistic' production of a new type, a type present in germ in the capitalist industry, but held in check so long as the new medium is maintained as a medium of reproduction, conveying individual art works of the old type in a new way. In this perspective, the Threepenny Lawsuit judgement, by insisting on the independent creative activity of the adaptation process as distinct from that of the individual writer whose work has been adapted, represents a progressive position compared to that of those writers who insist on individual creativity as the definition of art and hence its incompatibility with mass reproduction.

What is this new conception of 'art' present in germ in the capitalist film? First, it is an art which is *useful*, and to specific social groups with specific tastes and interests:

'Now within a determinate class . . . taste is perfectly capable of being productive, insofar as it creates something like a "life-style". Immediately after the bourgeois revolution of 1918, tendencies in this direction could be detected in film. Broad strata of white-collar workers who saw in the inflation the possibility of an ascent into the ruling class learnt from Bruno Kastner and so on a remarkably stylised manner that could be studied in every coffee-house.'

This is the theme of the *model* present in a great deal of Brecht's work: art is something that is useful because it provides models of behaviour. Second, this new 'art' is one that is external, anti-introspective, demonstrative, an art of the scientific instrument:

'In reality, the film requires externalisation and nothing introspectively psychological. And in this tendency capitalism has quite plainly a revolutionary effect, insofar as it provokes, organises and automatises determinate needs on a mass scale. It destroys wide stretches of ideology when, concentrating only on the "external" action, dissolving everything into processes, renouncing the hero as a medium, man as the measure, it demolishes the introspective psychology of the bourgeois novel.'

On the other hand the effect of the old conception of art is directorial stupidity and naturalism: 'The ordinary director, concerned to work as true to nature as possible, meaning by nature what he has seen on the stage, ie concerned to provide as indistinguishable an imitation of a work of art as possible, attempts to conceal all the failings of his apparatus in giving this true-to-nature reflection. . . . He is miles away from any inkling that pre-

cisely these failings of his apparatus might be advantages, for this would imply a refunctionalisation (*Umfunktionierung*) of the film.' 21

Thus, according to Brecht, the dominance of this type of art in the cinema is the effect of an outdated ideology necessary to the superstructure of the capitalist social formation in the era of imperialism, but already in direct conflict with the process of production on which the extraction of surplus value in the film sector depends. 'Capitalism is consistent in practice because it has to be. But if it is consistent in practice, it is inconsistent in ideology.'

It is worth stopping to analyse this argument a little more closely. Brecht bases it not only on the Threepenny Lawsuit, but also on a remarkable German appeal court judgement of 1923, overturning a previous judgement that a film production company which signs a contract for a film script from a writer is then obliged to make a film from that script, as would be the case with a publisher and an author, or with a theatre and a playwright. The appeal court ruled: 'It is not possible to say, as is said in the judgement in dispute, that there are no visible grounds to treat the film writer any differently from, or worse than, the theatrical writer' or the author of a book. It offered two arguments in support of this. First, the greater risk taken by the film production company.

'The film entrepreneur . . . is the manufacturer of a mass-produced commodity which is to go all over the world. Because of this, and the concomitant economic risk, he has to bear a greater financial burden; hence the financial contributions have to be judged differently. . . . Moreover, he has to work on payments made in advance and is far more dependent on the changing times, public taste, the actuality of the subject-matter, competition in the world market, etc, than the theatrical director in his town. . . . Hence a rational adjustment of interests – the starting-point of a sound economic life – between the film writer and the film manufacturer cannot be conceived in the same way as that between writer and publisher or playwright and theatre director.'

Second, the fact that filming a written script is not just a process of duplication, as printing is supposed to be the duplication of the author's manuscript, but a creative process in its own right:

'The film has its own laws, which are not just of an optical kind [ie, of a purely mechanically reproductive kind], but affect and determine the essence and content of what is represented. The essence is the dissolution of the dramatic process into individual images, as is clear from the disappearance of the word and the concentration on short individual pictorial scenes. Their concatenation and combination, arrangement and endowment with verisimilitude are only contained in germ in the original film script. They follow determinate principles which are different from those

- 22 of verbal drama and also contrast with those of pure theatrical mime. To transpose all these requirements as it were into reality, not just to give them a stage form, is the concern of the film director. He is not just the agent of the film writer, but at least his collaborator.'

Brecht's interpretation: 'The defence of the author's immaterial rights has disappeared, since "a greater financial burden" falls on the manufacturer. . . . The whole is . . . a document of the most decisive materialism.' Significantly, he concentrates on the first reason, ie the fact that the firm takes a greater financial risk, and pays much less attention to the second, ie the attribution of creativity to the director in the film-making process itself.

In German, what the English and Americans call copyright is called *Urheberrecht*, in French *droit d'auteur*, in Italian *diritto di autore*, all of which mean 'author's rights'. The English term is more pragmatic and more naked. What is at stake in this domain of the law is not the defence of the immaterial property of the individual author or artist so much as the security of the publisher, the mass producer of copies. He ensures himself against plagiarism by buying the exclusive reproduction rights from the author, and the author's claim to those rights depends on his individual 'creative contribution' to the work in question. The distribution of works of art as commodities is based on the attribution of alienable immaterial rights in those works to those designated as their authors, since authors, unlike copiers, are supposed to make a creative contribution to them. The history of copyright in the photographic arts is essentially a history of the extension of the legal definition of what constitutes a creative contribution; initially both photograph and film were regarded as reproductions of the pro-filmic object or event, or the text which these themselves reproduced, and hence were vested with no immaterial rights in themselves. Brecht's 1923 judgement is a fairly early example of immaterial rights being vested in the film as such as itself a 'product of creation'. In bourgeois law, this creation is always individual – works of art must be the expressions of an individual personality, or of several individual personalities. The 1923 judgement, with its Kuleshovian definition of filmic creativity, plainly singles out the director as another creative individual in this sense. In Brecht's day, immaterial property in the cinema still essentially resided in written texts – the film script or the book adapted, and the films themselves merely reproduced the text, but subsequently the notion of creativity has become so extended that almost any *prise de vues* is legally recognised as a creative product.

Thus though Brecht is correct to assert that the 1923 judgement and the verdict in the Threepenny Lawsuit represent the courts guaranteeing capital's appropriation of immaterial rights in its products, the immaterial rights of the author or individual artist

are not in general an outdated obstacle to a capitalism he sees as no longer bothered about contracts ('Are there contracts in nature? Does nature need contracts? The great economic interests unfold with the force of nature'), they are precisely the instrument whereby capital carries out that appropriation. The immaterial rights of individual artists have if anything grown in importance with the rise of finance capitalism, and the film industry, rather than more and more proletarianising its brain workers, has maintained more and more of them in the state Brecht calls 'proletaroid' in the *Notes to Mahagonny*: 'co-earners or sharers in the profits – hence co-rulers economically speaking, but socially already proletaroids' – a formulation which, though written in 1928, more or less describes his own position in Hollywood, with royalties or fees in lieu of royalties as the form of his payment, but working as an independent, not on contract or as an employee of one of the film companies. Concomitantly, rather than recognising any degree of collective creativity, or finding individual creativity a bar to artistic production, capital has attributed more and more individual creativity to its more specifically cinematic workers. Brecht has not fully escaped an immediate reflection of his immediate class position: as a writer living off royalties earned on works sold as commodities. He has inverted his values, seeing this position not as a nobler realm of old liberties increasingly encroached on by the marketplace, but as an outdated one, a bar to the advance of social productivity and the establishment of a new social order bringing with it a new place for the artistic worker and artistic production. This enables him to see much more clearly than even the left wing of his colleagues, and more, to cause much of this to be seen in the sociological experiment of the Threepenny Lawsuit. But I think it is undeniable that the real movement of capitalism has just escaped him, and the general tendency of production in the capitalist film industry has been not the one he foresaw of an increasing proletarianisation and an increasing necessity to recognise the direct creativity of the film apparatus as a whole; on the contrary, it has been far more in the other direction towards the increasing recognition of a wider and wider variety of individual creative contributions. 23

The same insight, and some of the same blindspots, can be seen in the Hollywood experience. Here, too, Brecht tried to engage with the film industry, hoping to get some results, if only in the form of an experiment, from the collaboration. (Here the form the experiment takes is not the public one it took in Germany in 1931, with a trial and texts accompanying it, but the form of the archive record which he kept of his work.) His main intellectual enemies, as revealed by the *Arbeitsjournal*, are the same traditional in-

24 intellectuals (of right and left) he had attacked in the *Threepenny Lawsuit* – the defenders of the freedom of the creative individual against the encroachments of the market economy (from which they derived their incomes): most specifically in California the exiled members of the Frankfurt School (Horkheimer, Adorno, Pollock) whom he labelled ‘tuis’ (from an earlier ‘Sinification’ of ‘intellectual’) and about whom he invented or embroidered scurrilous stories with Hanns Eisler, who of the people he knew in America at that time was probably closest to him in formation, position and understanding. However, the position was as contradictory as that in the *Threepenny Lawsuit*, too. The tuis were his neighbours and social friends – he ate at their houses and vice versa. His circle consisted of émigré intellectuals, writers and actors, and Brecht shared their social position and, spontaneously, much of their hostility to American life. It is striking that in the *Arbeitsjournal* there is none of the liking for America, even at the level of landscape, that is expressed, for example, by Douglas Sirk in his interviews. Brecht had to some degree shared in the 1920's German Americanism, but it is clear that America was a major disappointment to him, both the East coast, which he had visited in 1935 for the New York production of *The Mother*, and the West Coast where he lived during the War. Brecht's sense of his position is clearly expressed in a note on an argument against Pollock at a meeting of the Frankfurt School members: ‘Eisler and I lost patience and put ourselves in the wrong, for want of anywhere better to put ourselves.’ His relations with Lang, however, show the same tendency to see himself as the writer, indeed the creative individual, though consciously he would not have allowed himself that status, facing Lang, the director as representative of the film industry. Thus, except for one occasion when he went behind Lang's back to get more money, Brecht seems never to have dealt with Pressburger directly, but always through Lang. But at this time, Lang was no longer on contract, he was, as he says, ‘free-lancing’. Hence his legal relation to the film industry was the same as Brecht's, however much more secure he may have been in that position as a well-known director with some successful American films behind him. But Brecht's image of his own part in the deal with Pressburger and Arnold Productions is not just that of a less experienced and less prestigious partner of Lang's, but rather that of a creative writer leaving the business side of the deal entirely to Lang:

‘While I dictate the story, Lang is upstairs in the studio negotiating with the money men. As in a propaganda film, figures and mortal shrieks come down to us: “\$30,000” – “8 per cent” – “I can't do it”. I got out into the garden with the secretary. The thunder of guns from the sea. . . .’

Hence also, to Lang's present indignation, he tends to be cast as

the villain in the *Arbeitsjournal* when Brecht's real dispute is with Pressburger or Wexley. The script collaboration with Wexley broke down completely, through no fault of Lang's, who, unlike Pressburger, spoke for Brecht at the ASG hearing over the script credit. From both Lang's and Brecht's accounts it seems that Brecht used the *Arbeitsjournal* to vent objections to Lang's advice on what was or was not possible in Hollywood that he did not at the time put to Lang. On the other hand, it is also clear that there was no realisation of Brecht's conception of a genuine collective work on the film, that is the kind of work which was established in the case of *Kuhle Wampe*, and exactly the words he applies to the *Threepenny Opera* film are true of *Hangmen Also Die*: 'At no time during the work . . . did the participants have the same conception of the subject-matter, of the aims of the film, of the audience, of the apparatus, and so on.'

Let me close by examining the two films that we saw yesterday in the light of this discussion. In *The Threepenny Lawsuit*, Brecht himself more or less refuses to talk about the film Nero, Tobis and Warner Brothers eventually made; he dismissed it as an unfortunate byproduct of a valuable sociological experiment:

'There are progressive tendencies which lead to results signifying regressions in themselves. One of the reasons for this is the fact that such tendencies can have several results at the same time (in our case, for example, other results than, precisely, the film).'

In Germany the lawsuit, its effects in the press and the resultant text; in Hollywood the record that went into the archive, and more important the money, are the valuable results; the films in both cases are unfortunate and reactionary byproducts. His final word on *Hangmen Also Die* was 'The Lang film (now called *Hangmen Also Die*) has given me the breathing space for three plays'.

Brecht's outline for *The Threepenny Opera* film introduced a wholly new element, precisely the welt of the title. One of Peachum's beggars interferes with MacHeath's theft of a grandfather clock for his wedding and denounces his gang to the police. The gang retaliate by robbing Peachum's safe and beating up the beggar – hence the welt. Peachum exploits the welt as a sign of the decline of law and order rather than the coronation procession as such to blackmail Tiger Brown. While MacHeath is in gaol, Jenny takes over a bank by legal means in his name, and the banking community demand the release of their new colleague. Tiger Brown realises the power of the organised poor through a nightmare and decides finally to sacrifice his friend Mackie, while Peachum similarly sees the danger of unleashing this power in his campaign for the man with the welt. The two meet and agree to

26 gaol the man with the welt as an agitator instead. Meanwhile mounted messengers (in a limousine flanked by police motorcycles) arrive with MacHeath's release.

The shooting-script, which differs markedly from the film finally released, starts by following the outline fairly closely – the wedding sequence is put before the presentation of Peachum's headquarters, and the incidents of the beggar's denunciation of the clock robbers and the theft from Peachum's safe are added, but the second half of the script, presumably the section written after collaboration with Brecht broke down, returns to the original opera, simply stressing the legal control of a bank acquired by the gang under Jenny, and ending with Peachum defeated, Mackie and Tiger Brown united in the bank, MacHeath's bail money serving as the latter's contribution to the bank's capital. The mounted messenger is more or less suppressed.

The film, on the other hand, makes a number of significant changes in relation to the script, mostly bringing it closer to the opera. For a start, it suppresses all elements in the shooting script relating to the welt, the incident with the grandfather clock now being given a new motivation by MacHeath's message to Tiger Brown. It retains the reversed order of the first two acts and the emphasis on the bank, and has a finale closer to that in *The Welt*, all three main male characters uniting in the bank, and a few other details from *The Welt* are added – for example, the scene where Polly and Mrs Peachum stand in front of the shop-window admiring the wedding dress as MacHeath's reflection appears beside it. But despite sticking closer to the opera than either the outline or the shooting script, the approach represents a radical deviation from its intentions. Firstly, all songs are suppressed that have no diegetic motivation (save the Cannon Song at the end which is sung in the manner of a musical with the assumption that characters can simply break into song, and the later introductions of the *Moritat*, diegetically introduced in the first sequence but thereafter addressed directly to the audience as a punctuating device roughly corresponding to the breakdown into acts of the stage version), and there is none of the opera's emphasis on the difference between the acting and singing expressed both in the stage direction calling for a different lighting for songs and action in the opera and in the annotation that singing style and acting style should be kept as far apart as possible. Secondly, the songs suppressed include all Brecht's adaptations from Villon (some still remain in the shooting script). In the lawsuit, Nero's lawyers resurrected the charge of plagiarism that had been made against Brecht himself for incorporating lines from Ammer's translations of Villon in his own versions, and hence Nero had more or less admitted Ammer's copyright, which is one reason these songs may be missing. On the other hand, this suppression is again one of heterogeneity: something which has been taken from outside and

represents quite another world than that of the action of the opera has been removed from the film, reinforcing the overall homogeneity of atmosphere and representation. Thirdly, Andreiev's sets and Pabst's direction concentrate on creating the atmosphere of an imaginary turn-of-the-century or even Dickensian London. This is most obviously marked by the change of the setting of the wedding from the Duke of Somerset's stables where it is set in opera, outline and script, to a warehouse which gives Andreiev the chance to construct a dockland set with brick vaults, hanging ropes, stairways and drums drawing on the tradition of romantic illustration from Piranesi on. Finally, the actual, rather than dreamed presentation of the beggar's procession, defeated by police, banks and business, establishes the film within a tradition which Benjamin called *left-wing melancholy*, embodying a defeatist belief in the inevitability of successful counter-revolution, leaving only nostalgia for the good old days when gangsters were gangsters, not bank directors. The last lines of the version of the *Moritat* written by Brecht for *The Welt* –

‘ For some are in the darkness
the others in the light
and one sees those in the light
those in darkness one does not see ’

– are sung in the film against shots of the demonstrating beggars disappearing into the darkness. Brecht's point in the song, and indeed in the whole opera, is that its action remains totally within a bourgeois world which depends on the labour of the proletariat and is going to be overthrown by it but in which the proletariat can never appear in person, only, precisely, as a nightmare; the non-appearance of the real proletariat is thus a reprieve for this bourgeoisie in the outline, whereas in the film it is the real proletariat that disappears back into the darkness, leaving behind the victorious alliance of finance and industrial capital and the state. The fate of the mounted messenger is symptomatic here: whereas for Brecht he is a *deus ex machina*, saving bourgeois characters and bourgeois operatic forms simultaneously – which is why, as Brecht insisted, he should arrive on a horse, because he appears from outside the world of the play and gives a resolution which does not exist in capitalism itself (as a comparison Brecht suggested that the journalist who arrives at the last minute with the vital evidence clearing the hero in a court-room drama should be drawn on to the stage in a swan); in the film, however, the dignified old bank messenger, a subordinate character within the action and a typical representative of the German bureaucracy, arrives to save the ruling class.

In *Hangmen Also Die*, Brecht clearly hoped to save certain elements of the demonstrative cinema he had proposed in *The Threepenny Lawsuit* from the peripeteia of the intrigue Lang insisted were necessary for a Hollywood film. He hoped to be able to

28 include certain scenes from the script in the *Versuche*, if and when this series was continued:

‘ If I could go on with the *Versuche*, . . . I should print in them some scenes from the script of *Trust the People*. The first scene, say, in which, before the assassination, Heydrich shows Czech industrialists the leaflets with the slowdown tortoises that have been found in the munition works. This is an intelligent description of a modern tyrant: terror is imposed because the Czech workers sabotage production for Hitler’s war. German terror is thereby given the same impersonality as the Czech assassination. – Then there are some of the hostage scenes, showing class distinctions in the concentration camp. Five minutes before the Nazis take hostages to their execution, there are anti-semitic outbursts among them, etc.’

Lang implies that he wanted these scenes separable from the film in the same way:

‘ Brecht put forward the proposal to work up the scenes with the hostages . . . so that later, when the Hitler régime in Germany had been overthrown, it might be possible to show them in Germany apart from the original film as a separate, quasi-documentary film. I was quite in accord with the idea.’

Once again, this is Brecht’s notion of the model: the scenes representing typical actions or gesticulations, even if anti-social, could be taken out of the film and used to demonstrate the nature of the Nazi régime to the German people themselves after the War. However, nearly all the hostage scenes were cut by Lang from the final version of the script, leaving of the scenes Brecht mentions only the first scene on the Hradšchin. Significantly, as Brecht noted during the shooting, the demonstrative character could only be given to the Nazi scenes:

‘ When Lang rehearses a fist-fight between the Gestapo commissar and the heroine’s fiancé something almost like art emerges, the work has worth, the respectability of handicrafts. It is not uninteresting artistically how precisely and elegantly a prostrate man is kicked in the chest and then in the ribs! Of course, this fist-fight is arranged here and not on the supposedly nobler occasion when the kitchen staff of a restaurant prevent the capture by the Gestapo of an underground cell.’

And it is notable how different these two scenes of violence are in the film, Gruber’s efficiency and the demonstrative quality of the presentation is missing in the restaurant, where strikingly composed photography captures a mess of defenceless people incompetently trying to save the members of the underground. Whereas repetition is used as a distancing device in the first sequence (Heydrich’s German speeches are translated for us by an

interpreter, a device used again in the scene of Professor Novotny's arrest), in the scene (which Lang says 'could only have come from Brecht') where Professor Novotny dictates a letter for his son to his daughter Anna in the camp before he is shot, her repetitions of what he says are made utterly perfunctory: Anna repeats only very few of her father's words, so his speech becomes 'the truth' of the action spoken to us – he does more or less directly address the camera – and we are never given the distance we should have if he was genuinely dictating a letter to be learnt and Anna was genuinely learning the letter. The 'Brechtianism' of some of the scenes (and I would particularly stress the interrogation scenes, where Rheinhold Schünzel gives a far better performance as Inspektor Ritter than he did as Tiger Brown in *The Threepenny Opera*), is completely subordinated to a dramaturgy of empathy whenever it is the heroes, the representatives of the people, or the people themselves who appear. Thus whatever judgement is made of the film released as a whole, little is left in it to enable us to assess Brecht's intervention and how successful his intentions could have been.

Discussion

Colin MacCabe: Given, Ben, that you think that Brecht made an incorrect analysis of the cinema, what effect does this have for the intervention he might have made in Hollywood: how could he have made an anti-fascist film in Hollywood?

Ben Brewster: I'm not saying that he could have made an anti-fascist film in Hollywood. What I really feel is that in the *Threepenny Lawsuit*, which was of course written in 1931, before the rise of Nazism and indeed with the prospect of imminent proletarian revolution in Germany, he both overestimates and underestimates the resilience of capitalism. On the one hand, he attributes to the superstructures, in this case the courts, a very high degree of control of the means of representation of property rights; they can respect property rights over non-individual productive processes, while at the same time maintaining the law of private creativity and private appropriation. But on the other hand he's too optimistic at a productive level about the film industry, he thinks that the old forms of creativity break down in the cinema and potentially make the product unsaleable, which means that if artists no longer in thrall to these old forms can get on to the studio floor, they should have enormous power, simply by producing more saleable films. One of his major complaints about the work on the *Three-*

30 penny Opera film is that he had hoped his contract would have enabled him to work in some genuinely collaborative way in the industry. Very few of Brecht's works are written by himself alone, nearly all his plays are collective works of some kind. And that's even more markedly true of *Kuhle Wampe* than it is of his other work, where his collaborators were usually very much subordinate to him, which is not the case with *Kuhle Wampe* where Dudow's contribution is considerable – according to George Hoellering, the original invention of the urban slums/tent colony/workers' sports trichotomy was all Dudow's. *Kuhle Wampe* was Brecht's model of cinematic work, it was what he'd hoped to get out of the *Three-penny Opera* film and thought he had secured by very specific clauses in his contract, precisely the clauses that the courts eventually threw out. I quoted what he said about the absence of collaboration in the film as eventually made, that there isn't any agreement between the makers about what they're doing; he goes further and suggests that the process of production of a film in the capitalist industry is a constant series of displacements. You have a financier who puts up the money, but because he's a businessman, he doesn't want to have anything to do with art, so he employs a director. The director is an artist, so he won't have anything to do with technique and he has to have a cameraman to run the machines. Because the cameramen are incompetent even as technicians, they don't really want to exploit the possibilities of their instruments, they want to photograph works of art given to them, and they have to have a writer to produce the work of art to be filmed. And the writer is necessary, too, because the audiences are not allowed to do the writing themselves, an active audience is discouraged by the particular way the writer is used. There is this constant displacement of responsibilities, so that the final result is an accident which is not really the result of a genuine collaboration, even though it is in fact the result of a lot of people's work. It follows that if only a group with a genuinely collective conception of film-making could get their hands on the machines, since they would be working in conformity with the true potential of the cinematic apparatus, they would be enormously productive, even in a capitalist sense. Only the form of the law keeps them out. But in the end the law is subordinate to profit which depends on real productivity. That's Brecht's analysis. Now I think that represents an enormous underestimation of the particular productivity of the aesthetic of Hollywood and the film industry, its real power to provide audiences with something they would willingly buy. And Brecht never got to grips with what that aesthetic was.

B: Given that Brecht was so far ahead of other people in political, Marxist terms, given also that he was a German, a left-wing German, and there was so much anti-Germanism as well as anti-Nazism in the USA at the time, it may be that he chose not to

take on the film industry, which was so enormous and so alive with capitalist activity, which was quite the opposite of what he was all about, and it was better for him to get the money to work over which he had more control – eventually he produced one play in the USA and then went back to Europe and did some more. 31

BB: No, I'm not saying Brecht didn't do the right thing, that it would have been wrong just to make money out of the industry. In fact, I'm sure Brecht did want to do more than that: with *Hangman Also Die* he was very enthusiastic about the project initially, though by the end he was not. But I'm not saying that he was wrong not to try again, that that reveals a collapse on Brecht's part. All I'm saying is that he doesn't grasp the strengths in its own terms of Hollywood's aesthetic, which as you say was very different from his own, and therefore he probably over-estimated his capacity for imposing a certain amount of Brecht onto Lang, ie for making these extractable parts which he could then take out and use for other purposes. And on the other hand he had no conception of what was an alternative path for German émigrés, the path of someone like Douglas Sirk, who was also, like Brecht, a German theatre man who came, somewhat later, to detest his fellow 'tuis', but instead of developing a revolutionary art drawing on avant-garde techniques, as Brecht did, plunged into the popular, vulgar art of the commercial cinema, in Germany and then in America, cut his personal ties with the émigré intelligentsia, and was thus able to produce works that were much more conformist than any of Brecht's, more politically quietist, but have an aesthetic power which has made it possible now to read and comment those works as critiques of American capitalism. I doubt whether Brecht could have done this, or even should have, but also I don't think that he saw the possibility, which is the theoretical point.

C: So far you've talked entirely of Brecht's relation to film only in terms of the industry; Nero-Film, Praesens-Film, Arnold Productions were all commercial production companies and even Prometheus, despite its links with the KPD, operated as a commercial production and distribution firm. In your analysis, for Brecht any film work implied establishing some position in the commercial industry and the question is, on what terms is such collaboration possible. But nowadays, at least, radical film-making isn't restricted to that choice; there's now an independent film-making practice, independent in a different way from that in which Arnold Productions was an independent production company. How does your analysis of the development of copyright relate to this new independent film-making, and how would Brecht have responded to it?

BB: It is the development of copyright law towards the recognition of more and more individual creative contributions to film, the freeing of copyright from dependence on written texts, that has in

32 part made independent film-making in the modern sense commercially possible. A view of the Empire State Building from the street is in the public domain, but I expect that Warhol could now claim legal rights to the creative decision to film it, and would win a suit of plagiarism against someone who put a camera on the same spot and filmed it for the same length of time, which is what makes it commercially possible for Warhol and the independent distribution networks to distribute the film.

Martin Walsh: There is a precedent for that in the *Blue Angel*, which was remade by someone else in the 1950's, and Von Sternberg sued him for plagiarism and won the case on the grounds not of the script but of the fact that camera angles, shot lengths, set-ups and movements were the same as in his original version.

D: But the remake is still in distribution.

BB: Yes, because, having established his rights, Von Sternberg alienated them. That's like the architect and the hotel façade Brecht mentions. But to return to the question about independent film, I don't think that Brecht himself would have welcomed the development of independent film-making in the modern sense. He did hope for a down-grading of the writer from the cinema (and also from radio – another technical means of mass reproduction of 'art'), but he saw this in terms of the apparatus and the aesthetic it imposes making the writer one collaborator in the film rather than an individual artist. He never achieved this in a film except perhaps *Kuhle Wampe*. His conception of collaboration is precisely that the machine and the places it allows to the various cinema workers suppress the individual creator. That's why he was interested in cinema as a means of production, exactly Benjamin's point, that it removes the 'creative personality' from the definition of 'aesthetic effect'. He would therefore probably have been hostile to the development of an independent cinema which is very heavily based on individual production. So he barred himself from that development, which I suppose was just beginning to be possible legally and commercially in America when Brecht was there; the American underground really begins in the 1940's.

E: From what you've said it seems that Brecht's notion of the progressive character of film as such is the same as Benjamin's, that is, it's the technology of the cinema, its mechanical quality, that counts. And you've emphasised Brecht's belief that one of the effects of this technology is that it forces the collective production of art works, and the refusal of this is just the effect of the old definition of immaterial property and the old conceptions of art on the personnel of the industry. But his description of cinematic work as a series of displacements sounds very like an effect of the industry's technical sophistication, not a perverse refusal of it by film workers, it sounds like a description of a high degree of division of labour.

BB: I don't think Brecht's objection is to a strict division of labour. There isn't an incompatibility between collaboration and division of labour. It's clear that there was a high degree of division of labour in the making of *Kuhle Wampe*. What he stresses is the need for common aims, which for Brecht means political aims in the long run.

E: But the organisation of the division of labour in the film industry is an oppressive one, precisely dividing workers into creative and non-creative ones, before the legal definition comes in at all. Did Brecht say anything concrete about an alternative form of division of labour, or does it just remain an abstract idea?

BB: The latter really, except for the point about common political aims.

F: In both our discussions so far we have taken *Kuhle Wampe* as a model, and it is a very interesting film where its overall structure and dialogue are concerned, but at the detailed level of its filmic construction it's disappointingly traditional. Thus you have a conventional subjective sequence like the one when Anni has found she's pregnant, starting with a close-up of her face and then dissolving to a series of subjective images, closing with another close-up returning us to the first diegesis.

BB: It's an odd sequence, though. It has something in common with those rather similar Hollywood transitional montage sequences in *Hangmen Also Die*, in that it deviates from its immediate function: having started off being all about babies, by the end it's all about death, and in between there's a kind of documentary biography of a proletarian which quite exceeds Anni's subjective thoughts. There's a very curious sequence in *Hangmen Also Die*, over the sound of the chimes of clocks, cutting from the dying Dedich giving the details of the plan to make all the people of Prague collaborate to save the hostages to a montage of views of the city, especially of clocks, then to the bier of Heydrich, surrounded by SS guards and then to the dead Dedich, lying in state, not in the same kind of shot, but the same kind of ritual situation, which produces a very extraordinary identification of the Nazi leader and the hero of the Resistance, with the people, the invisible people in the houses you've seen in the middle section. Again, the conventional Hollywood scene-change montage is left far behind.

CMcC: That oddity might relate to a political issue in the film which presumably divided Lang and Brecht, or at any rate posed them difficult problems, the political issue of the national resistance against German occupation and the relation of revolutionary socialists to it. Whereas for Lang the bourgeois characters are central, including the terrorists, while the people are ambiguous, for Brecht the people ('trust the people') are the critics of their resistance 'leaders', and there seems to be a tension in the film, and particularly in that sequence, between those two conceptions.

From Brecht to Film: Theses, Problems
(on *History Lessons* and *Dear Summer Sister*)

Stephen Heath

The films considered in the previous discussions have enabled us to focus Brecht's own work in the cinema and to begin to pose something of the problem of what has occasionally been called a 'Brechtian cinema'. That expression has its misleading aspect: it is not a question of defining an essential 'Brechtianism' and then casting around for films that might agree with it; rather, it is one of *using* the emphases of Brecht's theory and practice as a means of grasping, understanding, helping to resolve difficulties related to the artistic and ideological intervention of film – and perhaps in so doing we shall need to come back critically on certain of these emphases themselves. In a sense, that is, we have to define the *possible actuality* of Brecht's work.

Such an actuality is assumed explicitly in *History Lessons* (which takes its text from *The Business Deals of Mr Julius Caesar*) and in *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* and *Tout va bien* (with their quotations from Brecht), as it is assumed explicitly in various statements by Straub-Huillet and Godard-Gorin (the reference to Brecht often seems to play the major theoretical role for Godard – more so than, say, the reference to Vertov). But the films have not been chosen for simple 'Brechtianism' at this level, which is anyway absent from *Dear Summer Sister* and *Oshima* (for political reasons? the annexation of Brecht as 'official author' by the Japanese CP?). Nor, of course, have they necessarily been chosen because we regard them as 'good', as 'examples' (they are not contributions to a pantheon); for us here, for our discussions, they are 'texts', 'models' in the Brechtian acceptance, significant points of demonstration-reflection for thinking about 'film and politics'; what we must do is to approach them critically, 'un-finish' them a little: 'Criticism,' wrote Brecht, 'should transform finished works into unfinished works, proceeding analytically.'

Today, between the two films we saw yesterday and the two Godard films this afternoon, I want to offer some starting points for that criticism, trying to sketch out what is involved in the passage from Brecht to film and thus to set a context for looking

Overall, and fundamentally, the political problem of artistic practice is posed for Brecht in terms of the relation to reality, the grasp of reality in the relations of its production, comprehension, transformation. Art is a struggle in ideology by the distance it establishes in respect of the ideological homogenisation of reality; a distance which, destruction of the forms of universality, is the demonstration of class position. Hence art – art as specific intervention – is not unity but contradiction, not reflection but construction, not meaning but interrogation, is lesson and action, ‘learning-play’ (Brecht’s nearest English equivalent for the German *Lehrstück*, the *action of a lesson*): in short, art must ‘pose questions which render action possible’.

Traditional discussions in aesthetics of the relation to reality turn on conceptions of ‘realism’ and those discussions can be refocussed critically in three Brechtian theses:

1. What conventionally is now called realism (a convention developed in the course of the nineteenth century in connection with the novel and painting and continued in the twentieth – inter alia by film) is in fact the reverse of a realism insofar as it denies any knowledge of production (and thus avoids any production of knowledge) via the tautology of reflection (defines itself outside of any relation other than that of a kind of immanent immediacy: ‘realism is the representation or reflection of reality’): appearance becomes the truth of a reality cleared – the work of the mirror – of all relations, of all process of production. In other words, conventional realism is an idealism and one can see why it should serve exactly as the literary religion of the bourgeoisie: it lets in history, arena of the dynamic expansion of that class, in order to foreclose it as the theatre of the ‘human’, the ideological term of that class’s domination (the ‘human’ that Brecht sees as the crucial component of ‘natural “phonetic” representation’, as ‘the hyphen of the universal’).
2. Thus ‘the simple “reproduction of reality” says nothing at all about that reality’ (the significance perhaps of the workman in *Tout va bien* painting out the framed photograph of the Salumi factory). An effective – non-idealist – realism is essentially *critical*: ‘The critical element in realism must not be glossed away. It is decisive. A simple reflection of reality, were such a thing possible, would not be what we want. Reality must be criticised as it is given form, it must be criticised in realist fashion. The critical element is decisive for the dialectician, in it lies commitment, and here science, more precisely Marxist science, can come to the help of art.’ Critical, in opposition to the myth of reflection, realism is the crisis (Brecht is fond of giving the term ‘criticism’ its

36 etymological force) of appearance, is a production of knowledge, where the science of that production is historical materialism. In this sense, realism is exactly, must always be, a *history lesson*, the realisation of a fully materialist historical comprehension of reality, of reality in its historico-social process.

3. As production of knowledge (criticism, crisis, realism) artistic practice critically includes in the movement of that production the receiver – as also the initiator – of the work of art. This inclusion, of course, is what Brecht theorises as *distanciation* which, far from the homogeneity of the constitutive separation of reality, reflection and receiver in conventional realism, marks the dialecticisation of the relations of those three instances across a demonstration of contradictions. Distanciation, realism, are neither form nor content but, in excess of that habitual opposition, operation, construction, the passage of materialism as the demonstration of the objective process of historical reality and of the relations of subjectivity in that process, of the social definition of the subject in the contradictions of the class struggle. The politics of art, of critical realism, is the posing of another subjectivity: crisis, comprehension, transformation – ‘questions which render action possible’.

There is a kind of epitomising example of these theses to be found in Brecht's writings in the various discussions of the photograph, an example which is of particular interest here at once because the photograph has provided so central an image for the conventional thinking of realism and because it has evident bearings for the question of the specific practice of film. The sentence previously quoted concerning the simple reproduction of reality is indeed immediately followed by the introduction of this example of the photograph: ‘More than ever, the simple “reproduction of reality” says nothing at all about that reality. A photograph of the Krupp or AEG factories [one can see the closeness to *Tout va bien*] tells us practically nothing about those institutions. . . . We need effectively to “construct something artificial”, “something posed” . . . to give only the immediate experience of reality is not to reproduce reality.’ For Brecht, the photograph is the sublimation of reality into passive ideality; hence his constant emphasis on the need for ‘literarisation’, for the montage construction, operation, of the photograph with language (language able to confer on the photograph what Benjamin calls ‘its revolutionary use value’). A materialist practice of film must then in turn be inevitably involved in combat against the sublimation of film in the luminous reality-truth of the photograph, a sublimation which is, as it were, the very ideology of the ‘birth’ of cinema (‘nature caught in the act’, commented one of the first spectators at the Grand Café; ‘universal language discovered at last’, wrote another; leaving Lumière to confirm in retrospect that ‘the subjects of the films I chose are the proof that my aim was to reproduce life itself’ – life

itself at the first showing consisting largely of the glorification of industry, the workers leaving the factory, and family, mother and Lumière baby in a laughing domestic scene). There is scarcely need to trace out the various ramifications and sophistications of this ideology until its apotheosis in the Bazinian metaphysic of film as the possibility of the perfect transparent coincidence of nature and art, of nature as art ('If the event is sufficient unto itself without the *metteur-en-scène* needing to shed any further light on it through camera angles or prejudices, it is precisely because it has attained that perfect luminosity which allows art to unmask a nature which at last resembles art'); all that has to be said is that the photograph functions as a point of reference for film according to a circle in which cinema is the perfection of photography (the addition of movement; it may be noted that Lumière was careful not to demonstrate his invention before having perfected it to meet existing photographic achievement) and the photograph is the perpetual standard of film, the image of its realism. Film as materialist production of knowledge must then in turn again proceed as literarisation, as montage construction against the photograph, that image. Godard-Gorin refind Brecht's very emphases at just this point: 'the photograph is not the reflection of reality but the reality of the reflection'; consequently, 'reality for us is less finding images of reality than constructing from reality images which give an account of that reality'.

The theses on realism, the example of the photograph, can guide us in thinking Brecht and cinema, in thinking the terms of the creation and recreation – there is no one way, no 'form' to be canonically transposed from theatre to film ('As regards the validity of literary forms, the question must be posed to reality, not to aesthetics, not even to the aesthetics of realism. There are a hundred ways of speaking, as of suppressing, the truth') – of a Brechtian practice in the cinema. They indicate straight away, as has already been suggested, that such a practice is, will be, in direct opposition to the founding ideology of cinema: vision is not knowledge, knowledge being on the contrary the fracturing of vision, the decipherment of the objective contradictions of reality: 'Theatre [cinema] becomes the affair of philosophers, but of philosophers who wish to transform the world, not merely explain it'; the potential of the world for transformation 'lies in the fact that it is filled with contradictions. In things, men, processes, there is something that makes them what they are at the same time something which makes them other. For they develop, change so as to become unrecognisable. Things, as precisely they are today, contain within them, "unrecognisable" in that form, other, prior, elements, antagonistic to what now exists.' The vision of representation is the mode of this miscognition, the stasis of a system which masks structuring work, the terms of its production. Against vision, a materialist practice of film thus proposes and opposes

38 analysis, 'analysis by means of image and sound' (to quote Godard on *Deux ou trois choses*) in which sound is not some supplement to the cinematic essence of the image but, on the contrary, its essential despectacularisation. *British Sounds*, *Pravda*, *Lotte in Italia* are explicit indications of this 'necessity for a philosophical work transforming the practice of images and sounds' (Groupe Dziga-Vertov), as too, differently, more obliquely, the extreme importance of the work on the sound-track in Straub (the film worked, working, in the relations image-sound) or Oshima (scene-debates, staging of dialogue, clash of languages, song, intertitles). Reality is to be grasped not in the mirror of vision but in the distance of analysis, the displacement of the ideology that vision reflects and confirms; 'the interests of the bourgeoisie are exposed by the corrosive action of the historical materialist method'.

The term for the realisation of that method in art is often in Brecht's writings *montage*, montage as the dialectical instrument of the crisis of false coherence, the dialectical instrument of the demonstration of contradictions, *at every level*. Though Brecht never makes such a reference, the force – the scope – of montage comes near that given it by Vertov: 'Every Kino-Eye film is in montage from the moment of the choosing of the subject until the final copy; it is in montage, that is to say, during the whole process of the fabrication of the film': exactly the emphasis of Godard-Gorin in their description of *Tout va bien* as Brechtian film: 'We took over one of Vertov's insights. For him, there was montage before shooting, montage after shooting. The principle political notion is montage. Here it is that cinema is more directly political and modern than other arts.'

The film *in montage*; its realism, its analysis, its objectivity the production-demonstration of contradictions including those of the specific production-demonstration. A film is a reflection neither of nor for a central subjectivity, neither of nor for a simple presence of sender or receiver. Dialectically, then, film as production (as opposed to film as repetition of the achieved ideological configuration of reality) must inscribe the relations of its subjectivity,¹ from where it speaks, to whom, as a process of division, displacement, transformation.

Comparing *Tout va bien* and *Coup pour coup*, Marin Karmitz comments: '*Tout va bien*, which deals with the same situation as *Coup pour coup*, is also a Brechtian film. But Godard has a different conception of the relations between the intellectual and popular struggles. For him, the creator must express his own point of view through characters reflecting his experience – thus Montand in the film plays the role of Godard. It is my belief that my point of view presents no interest, except perhaps as element of artistic intervention.' Two conceptions round the one idea of the Brechtian film: for Karmitz, the cinéaste is the term of a self-effacing artistic intervention which lets the reality speak; for Godard (-Gorin), the

position of the cinéaste is the point of a series of contradictions which form part of the reality to be demonstrated; to say that *Tout va bien* and *Coup pour coup* deal with the same situation is to elide the radical difference between them (the radically different conceptions of a practice of film, of artistic intervention) – the latter aims at reality, the former at the analysis of reality, the latter works on, reconstructs, reality, the former works against, deconstructs, reality, is an intervention on ideology, on representation, and cannot but pose the position – the point of view – of the cinéaste and the making of the film *in consequence*.

As for the inscription of the spectator in the work of the film, the destruction of the unity of identification, that is no doubt the most obvious of Brechtian emphases: 'the individual as spectator loses his epicentral role and disappears; he is no longer a private person "present" at a spectacle organised by theatre people, appreciating a work which he has shown to him; he is no longer a simple consumer, he must also produce. Without active participation on his part, the work would be incomplete (and were it complete, then it would *today* be imperfect). Included in the theatrical event, the spectator is "theatricalised"; thus less goes on "within him" and more "with him"'. Just as the action of play or film is to be broken from the continuity of psychology ('the mimesis serves henceforth to show the *relations* existing between men . . . on his own, the individual is the source of no relationship'), so the spectator is to be broken from the continuity of an identification-position which holds him as the blind-spot of ideology, its vision and its image; the spectator too, that is, is to be divided, displaced, pulled into the radical exteriority of his/her process as subject which poses the construction of subjectivity in the objective contradictions of the class struggle. The problem, the political problem, for artistic practice in its ideological intervention could be given precisely as the transformation of the relations of subjectivity in ideology. Evidently, such an inclusion-transformation of the spectator cannot be reduced to this or that 'technique', as, for example, some supposed 'address' to the audience (of the *Tom Jones* type). It can be examined, differently, in the demontage of the spectator (a dialectical inclusion that negates) in *Death by Hanging* (which can then address the audience at the end from that contradiction), in the hollow of the play between Banker, Peasant, Lawyer and Writer in the direction of the Young Man in *History Lessons* (as it were the constant misaddress of angles, faces, the figure of the young man in the montage of the film), in the movement of *Tout va bien* holding a discourse by the side of the spectator as the instance of his/her contradiction (the spectator inscribed in the ideological space of the blanks in the series of interviews, and displaced in the return of the demonstration of the answer).

A problem remains, however, in this connection. Where Godard-Gorin can talk of film as the most political and modern of arts,

40 for Brecht cinema is regressive (identificational) insofar exactly as it cuts off the spectator from production, from performance: 'the public no longer has any opportunity to modify the actor's performance; it is confronted not with a production but with the result of a production, produced in its absence.' This 'fundamental reproach' gains in intensity if we remember the recent bringing to light of texts which suggest the *fundamental* importance attached by Brecht to the *Lehrstück*, it – and not finally the epic theatre play, the *epische Schaustück* – being the 'model for the theatre of the future'. The aim of the *Lehrstück*, the learning-play, is 'to show' a politically wrong mode of behaviour and hence to teach a correct mode of behaviour'; the realisation of this aim 'lies in the fact that it is acted, not in the fact that it is seen', it 'completely transforms the role of acting; it suppresses the system actor/spectator, knows only actors who at the same time are apprentices'. The *Lehrstück*, in fact, as model for the future, is thus a kind of school of dialectics.

Nothing of the sort in film, cinema as art of the product, the public screened from production. The problem is posed therefore, if film is to be considered specifically in a Brechtian perspective, as to the limitations – the ideological compensations – of cinema as institution; problem of the basic apparatus in its registration and repression of difference (as approached in the two studies by Baudry), problem exactly of the repetition of the conditions of the imaginary constitution of the ego and the redefinition of the subject as all-perceiving, of cinema as 'imaginary signifier' (according to the description begun by Metz). Analysis continues, needs to be continued; its result, however, cannot be to declare cinema by nature reactionary, or, at least it can only do so dialectically, exploiting its comprehension in the interests of a demonstration-transformation of the cinematic institution in its ideological effects, demonstration-transformation of the *space* of film at every level.

History of the reality of its own production, grasping of reality historically in that production; for Brecht, the typical – the socially analytic – is exactly 'that which has historical meaning'; for Lang, *Hangmen Also Die* was a 'historical novel' with universal signified, the eternity of struggle ('Ever we struggle'), for Brecht, abortively, it was the historical actuality of a specific, and analysable, instance of struggle: 'Historical conditions must obviously not be conceived (nor presented) as mysterious forces (the other side of the card); they are created and maintained by men (and will be changed by men); they are constituted by those very actions in which we participate.' Thus: demonstrate the historical nature of reality, pose from that demonstration the historical possibility of transformation – art as practical philosophy.

It follows that a materialist practice of film is faced with a number of tasks (tasks which interlock, dialogue with one another) focussed round the necessity to give reality historically, in the

social relations of its production, from the standpoint defined by 41
Marx in its absence in Proudhon: 'M Proudhon has understood extremely well that men make cloth, canvas, silk – it is very worthy of him to have understood so little! What he has not understood is that men, according to their faculties, also produce social relations, the social relations in which they produce the cloth and the canvas.' Those tasks extend at once to past and present (and from one and the other, dialectically – history lessons – to the future); the question of the past is that of rewriting history (Brecht's difficulty indeed in the work for *The Business Deals of Mr Julius Caesar*), of unblocking the memory of struggle from the stasis-repression of its current ideological reflection; that of the present, of posing object or situation in the history of its presence, giving it as document (an important term both for Straub and Godard), not in any 'documentary' sense but rather in that of text, material to be deciphered, to be read. *History Lessons, Death by Hanging, Tout va bien, Deux ou trois choses*, are there for – and as – discussion of these questions.

Vent d'est: 'We are never exactly contemporary with our present. History comes forward masked, is inscribed on the screen with the mask of the previous sequence and we no longer recognise anything in the film. The fault is of course not history's, it is that of our gaze, filled with the sounds and images we have been taught.' It is for a Brechtian cinema to work against that teaching, to unteach sounds and images – learning-play, history lesson.

Let me turn in conclusion to something of the two films we saw yesterday since, precisely, the stress on history will provide an entry to the terms of their activity.*

That stress is given immediately, of course, in the title of the Straub-Huillet film, *Geschichtsunterricht*: a film about history, or rather, a film which makes of a history lesson (the young man's as he listens) history lessons, a set of movements between past and present, pulling into the future, across Rome. Neither adaptation nor expression, the film is the *setting* of a Brecht text (as one might talk of a 'setting' in music), its recital almost; the text is spoken out in its clarity through the film which works on it in image, sound, voice, delivery, acting (for want of a better word), taking it at a distance so that it works for us now, in the process of the film.

The text is drawn from the 'Romanfragment' (Brecht's term for the piece – perhaps with some idea of a new genre?) *The Business Deals of Mr Julius Caesar* (*Die Geschäfte des Herrn Julius Caesar*), begun in 1938 and 'completed' by 1942 when Brecht seems to

* What follows is a highly abbreviated version of detailed remarks concerning *History Lessons* and *Dear Summer Sister*.

42 have proposed the subject to Dieterle for a film (later that year he shifted the proposal to 'The last days of Caesar'). Organised in four books, *The Business Deals of Mr Julius Caesar* demonstrates the relations between Caesar's rise to power and the interests of what Brecht calls 'the City', the *equites*, the merchant and banker class in a struggle against the power of the aristocratic senate. The demonstration proceeds, as it were, in contradiction to the figure of a young man who sets out to write the definitive heroic biography of Caesar and who is thus, twenty or so years after Caesar's death, visiting various people acquainted with Caesar at the start of his career. According to Brecht's own description, the novel is then the montage of the points of view provided by the accounts these people give, as well as by notebooks kept by a slave who was Caesar's chief household administrator, notebooks which form the whole of Books II and IV. Brecht declares his own point of view to lie in the montage, that is, in the undercutting of the young man's vision of history as the will of great men by a multiple focus on the economic and political determinations operative in Caesar's rise – at the time of writing, a kind of case-history reflection through Caesar on the relation of capital and fascism and the latter's exploitation of populism (the Cataline revolt).

The Straub-Huillet film uses no more than a small portion of the novel (all the spoken words in the film come directly from it); in a sense, the film 'de-anecdotalises' Brecht's text, retaining even in those sections it includes only historico-economic explanation (though mnemonic-traces of the novel here and there emerge – the Banker's wine, the Writer's house perched difficultly on a cliff, the streets of Rome themselves): the explanation is clear, posed, *proffered*. At three points, however, the delivery of the text is punctuated by those long blocks of the young man driving through the streets, the camera in the car, behind him, holding that series of frames – the windscreen, the side windows, the open sun roof, the rear-view mirror –, defining the other side, the 'people' of Rome, the movement across between Caesar's Rome and this Rome. How to grasp this Rome in its history lessons? The film is contained in a condensed reference: the opening shots show fascist monumental maps of the Roman Empire and Italy and a fascist statue of Caesar copied from a Roman *staute* erected after his death at the time of his mythologisation as hero, then the car starts the first drive; the closing shots cut from the Banker's final 'My confidence in him had proved to be well founded. Our little bank was no longer a little bank' to a long shot of a fountain suddenly brought in to a close-up of the carved woman's face with the water pouring from her mouth, and on the sound-track a passage from Bach's *St Matthew Passion* ('... break the false traitor, the bloody murderer'), a 'sudden fury' which runs back over the film to the explosion of the torrent of the stream intercut between the Banker and the Legionary. The meaning of *History*

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Lessons is that condensation over the clarity of the delivery of Brecht's text, the context of a constant work – angle, framing, camera movement – of address (the Banker, for example, holds a correct discourse from a wrong position to an idealist listener; hence everything he says is to be rewritten – rather as Brecht used to rewrite speeches by Hess and Göring –, deflected, taken out of its true). Such a meaning is not a 'message' but the relation of the spectator to the process of the film, to its complex work – the film itself a historic document in the present tense.

Evidently, *Dear Summer Sister* is very different (the 'shock' of seeing the two films together has its own importance); all the obvious things can be said at once: it seems far from distanciation, seems to rely on identification, seems to aspire to a straightforward continuity (conventional – 'academic' – editing), seems to have a simple narrative thread, and so on. Yet the film is also, and this is part of its interest, against these things insofar as it takes them as the point of the demonstration politically of the contradictions of a particular social reality.

The focus of that demonstration in *Dear Summer Sister* is Okinawa. The film was made in 1972, the year of the return of Okinawa to Japan subsequent to the Nixon-Sato agreement of 1969: in Oshima's terms, America's principal South-East-Asian base becomes Japan's first post-war colony. Thus *Dear Summer Sister* itself turns on history lessons – the reality of Japan in its development as 'world power' – and a history lesson, that of Sunaoko, the little sister who arrives in Okinawa to find her brother and who ends on the beach ('Miss Prosecutor') by demanding ('for my education, tell me') to know the truth. Lesson and truth, however, are not simple: at every step there are contradictions and the film 'blocks together' in a multiple heterogeneity. The narrative thread is a series of threads (Sunaoko's quest, Sakurada's search for an Okinawan to kill him, Momoko's relationship with Tsuruo, etc) intertwined as a number of openly stated coincidences (Sunaoko meets the brother she is looking for the moment she gets off the boat, she shouts his name in the police station and is immediately answered by the appearance of one of his possible fathers who happens to be the Police Commissioner, Sakurada finds an Okinawan who is looking for a Japanese to kill, etc) in an allegory (Japan is the 'big brother' to Okinawa as 'little sister', Tsuruo's Okinawan mother was raped by Japanese who are now Judge and Police Commissioner, the Japanese Sakurada finally kills the Okinawan Teruya, etc) which they set out again differently, not simply, producing contradictions in the play between Japan and Okinawa, generation and generation, family and history. The political comment – on Japanese war crimes and the continuing power of those responsible, on Japanese imperialism, on the exploitation of Okinawa – is clear and then at the same time difficult; the summer holiday – the strange language, the songs, the visit to the

44 monument (with a shaky hand-held 'holiday movie' passage), the drive through the streets (Sunaoko questioning her father, the Judge, about the brothels) – and the summer visitors are constantly reinscribed politically but that political reinscription is then again constantly re-inscribed, thought back into the family, into individual relations. The question of the film is 'what is it to be Japanese today?', and that question is *historical*, and that history includes the inscription of the subject, includes desire, sexuality, but politically.

So, the problem becomes that of a narrative form able to produce that complex throughout its contradictions, to pose the pleasure of an identification in the coalescence of image and desire as the term of an analysis that ceaselessly reposes that pleasure in new – transforming – relations of subject to meaning. Perhaps it is from here that the real issues of a 'Brechtian cinema' are to be grasped.

Discussion

Colin MacCabe: What I find difficult about your descriptions of the films is that whereas the additional information you gave us for the Oshima film is simply necessary to help us to understand how the public for whom the film was made would be able to read it, the additional information for the Straub is necessary for any audience to understand the history lesson better. Doesn't that mean that the history lesson isn't effective in the sense Brecht wanted, it doesn't operate that deconstruction of Caesar in relation to a contemporary political phenomenon, ie Hitler?

Stephen Heath: Yes, there's some truth in that. What's very clear in the Brecht novel is the idea of the deflation through understanding of a budding dictator, where the understanding is linked to an attempt to analyse the socio-economic reality behind his rise. That is less there in the Straub-Huillet film, which seems to me to be much more about an understanding of Caesar and where in that understanding of Caesar is our position today, where are we listening from (the theme of the young man listening) and what is the relation of that to modern Rome as it is shown.

James Pettifer: The problem that troubled me is that although I can see the function of the car sequences, marking the invisibility of the people of Rome in the events described, I wonder whether, the aesthetic effect of inducing a semi-hypnosis of the audience while they are on is actually unproductive in conveying those meanings.

Martin Walsh: Only unproductive in the sense that one might be lazy and refuse to work at it. It seems to me that one of the differences between the Oshima and the Straub-Huillet films is that the Oshima does allow the audience to sit back and take it as another movie – if you listened to people leaving the cinema yesterday it was clear that for them it was just a nice pretty movie, and none of the issues you described quite correctly as being in the film were in fact received by many of the audience here, whereas with the Straub-Huillet film, either you can object to it by saying I was bored, it was boring, which is simply a cop-out of any attempt to relate to that film, or you have to work with it. I would argue that the first long driving sequence, at which point you've only had the title of the film 'History Lessons', really forces you to engage with all kinds of issues, the issue of representation, for example, in the play of frames you've mentioned, the notion of what is history?, what does this vision of Rome we confront really tell us, and so on. It's very dense and to be bored is perhaps a refusal to think on the part of the audience. There's a quotation from Brecht that Ben gave yesterday to the effect that most directors try to hide discontinuities, ruptures in cinematic language; Straub-Huillet on the contrary foreground that in their work. In this sense the editing of *History Lessons* is its most crucial Brechtian strategy. It's difficult to discuss it in detail without having the film right here, but for example, each speech has its own self-sufficient system of editing. Each of the Banker's speeches can be analysed in terms of a very concrete and systematic articulation of variations, which has nothing to do with transparency, with illusionism, with hiding the existence of the two-dimensional celluloid material and in fact highlights it. Once again the audience has to work on it. It's that engagement, that elimination of the distinction between work and leisure that Straub-Huillet really concentrate on, whereas the Oshima film doesn't have that kind of emphasis.

SH: I disagree about the Oshima. I think *Dear Summer Sister* does have it effectively. For example, Okinawa represents a tourist area for Japan, and the film plays on the forms of a holiday movie, but from the start there is the notion that the main characters are tourists, but not ordinary tourists, because they are involved in a lesson, and that lesson also involves an audience that works.

The Politics of Separation

(on *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* and *Tout va bien*)

Colin MacCabe

In the programme notes to *Mahagonny*, the notes which Yves Montand refers to in *Tout va bien*, Brecht defines epic theatre in terms of a radical separation of its elements and distinguishes three such elements in the opera – the music, the text and the setting. In cinema, thanks to the work of Christian Metz, we can distinguish five different elements: the moving picture image, recorded phonetic sound, recorded musical sound, recorded noise and writing. Considered from the position suggested by the notes to *Mahagonny*, *Deux ou trois choses* can certainly be considered as an epic film, for its whole progress is a constant separation of its constitutive elements. Perhaps the element which is most obviously separated out in the film's progress is writing. So accustomed are we to a cinema which hides its writing away at the beginning or end of a film that it is with some shock that we discover it at all in Metz's classification, but such a cinema is directly challenged in *Deux ou trois choses* where it is impossible to ignore writing, as the book covers punctuate the action. This punctuation recalls Brecht's demand for a literalisation of the theatre; which literalisation was conceived exactly as the punctuation of representation with formulation, and this is exactly how the writing functions in *Deux ou trois choses* – constantly forcing us back to the problem of theoretically articulating the incidents which are represented on the screen. It is the effort to achieve this articulation which is exactly the process of learning – a process which can only operate on condition that we distance and separate ourselves from the full plenitude of the image – that we read a set of differences organised temporally and spatially. It is through this activity of reading that we take up that attitude of smoking and watching which Brecht saw as essential to any art which was concerned to do more for the spectator than relieve him of his money at the door and his mind once inside. Writing is such a powerful weapon in this battle for relaxation exactly because of its radical heterogeneity to the image – its insistence on meaning being produced through a process. It is interesting that the trailer for this film was entirely

written. Opening with the written word *SILENCE* in capital letters it went on with the written injunction to 'Learn in silence two or three things that I know about her' and then continued by running through twelve captions identifying the various areas covered by that third person pronoun, 'her'. The extent to which writing is resisted within the traditional cinema may perhaps find an index in the inordinate extra cost that distributors go to in order to dub rather than subtitle films. The explanation for this practice is not in terms of some supposed illiteracy but in terms of how disturbing it would be to the spectator.

The relationship between sound and image is also disrupted on all three levels. Generally there is the refusal to weight the soundtrack in relation to the image. Thus, for example, during the conversation between Juliette Janson's husband Robert and Juliet Berto in the café, the recorded phonetic sound does not receive the dominance that one naturally expects for it. More specifically, we can locate the separation between recorded phonetic sound and the image in the disjunction between Godard's voice which we can hear only with difficulty and the images we are confronted with. This separation is made explicit from the first shot when Godard uses his voice to redefine the image ('Her - that's Marina Vlady . . . Her - that's Juliette Janson'), leaves part of the image specifically undefined ('Her hair is dark red or light brown, I'm not quite sure which') and finally separates them completely as the description is pulled apart from the image ('Now she turns her head to the left' - she does not turn her head - 'but that is unimportant' - she turns her head to the left). There is very little recorded music in this film - but what music there is is firmly separated from the image through a repetition which can find no diegetic motivation. Finally there is the recorded noise which is brought to our attention as a separate element through the recurrent unsynchronised sounds of industrial construction. The attention focussed on these four matters of expression brings the fifth - the moving picture image - into a focus that enables us to study it, and this study becomes the explicit concern of the film in two scenes: the first in the café when the woman reading the magazine is shot from two mismatched positions (and there is the shot of the cup of coffee) and the second at the garage where the soundtrack explicitly points to the problem of finding the correct image for the events it is recounting.

At this point it could be objected with justice that the description of separation so far advanced is entirely formalistic. From the criteria so far mobilised it would seem that the perfect Brechtian film would be one in which all five matters of expression were lacking in any relation to each other. For so far we have ignored the purpose and aim of this call for separation - we have ignored exactly its politics. We can begin an investigation of the politics of separation through the consideration of another quotation from the notes to *Mahagonny*:

48 'So long', Brecht writes, 'as the expression "integrated work of art" means that the integration is a muddle, so long as the arts are supposed to be "fused" together, the various elements will all be equally degraded and each will act as a mere "feed" to the rest. The process of fusion extends to the spectator who gets thrown into the melting pot too and becomes a passive (suffering) part of the total work of art. Witchcraft of this sort must, of course, be fought against. Whatever is intended to produce hypnosis, is likely to induce sordid intoxication, or creates fog, has got to be given up'. What is important, therefore, is that in the separation of the elements the spectator gets separated out of this unity and homogeneity – this passivity – in order to enter into an active appropriation of the scenes presented to him. This active appropriation is the aim of epic theatre – it is the production of knowledge. Rather than a text compact with its own meaning, a text which confers a unity and gives a position to the subject, we want a text whose fissures and differences constantly demand an activity of articulation from the subject – which articulation in its constant changes and contradictions makes known – shows – the contradictions of the reader's position within and without the cinema.

The questions it is therefore necessary to pose are questions concerning how the separation of the elements must be produced in order that the spectator too will be separated out and can take up the relaxed attitude of the learner. The easiest way to answer this question is to make a detour through certain psychoanalytic conceptions. In those stages which are used to characterise the small infant's development – that familiar trio of the oral, the anal and the phallic – the central question is always one of separation: the separation from the breast, the faeces, the phallus. It is these separations which allow language to function and, as a necessary corollary, for desire to run its endless course. If we consider the small infant in the first stage of its development, we can postulate the child as initially experiencing two states of being – one of satisfaction at the breast and one of dissatisfaction which finds animal expression in the cry. It is at the moment at which the infant correlates the cry with the experience of dissatisfaction and its abolition that the cry ceases to be a signal, ceases to be animal expression and becomes a sign whose meaning is defined diacritically with the possibility of not crying. But this correlation of the cry with the experience of dissatisfaction and its abolition is exactly the identification of the breast as an object in the control of an other. As an object – that is to say as a perpetual play of presence and absence. It is with this play that we enter into the world of desire, the latter here not to be confused with the pleasure of union with the breast – the state of satisfaction, a minimum of tension – but seen as the desire for an object which can bring about the abolition of dissatisfaction but which, insofar as it is an object – that is to say a play of presence and absence – will be

desired again even in the experience of abolition. No longer therefore is the aim the minimum of tension but the maximum, and its discharge in a never-ending chain. Or: If we postulate an original identity of the infant and the breast – a state of being – then the arrival of language shatters that identity to produce an object – a question of having – but the presence of the object is now irremediably bound up with its absence – a matter of coming. But how are we to understand this linking of presence and absence? Insofar as it is an object, insofar as it has being plucked forth from the undifferentiated mass of existence, it is defined through the set of differences which it is not. Concerned with getting through life consciousness must studiously ignore this set of differences, but they must be there for the object to appear at all. It is here that Freud first located the existence of an unconscious – in the way in which these chains of differences constantly threaten to break and disrupt the necessarily homogeneous world of consciousness. It is here that we can understand how not only can we oppose pleasure to desire but also belief to knowledge. Caught in the homogeneous state of consciousness the object finds itself trapped in the unity of belief, ie conferred an identity. In order for knowledge to occur, there must be separation so that this identity is broken down into a set of relationships. On the one hand we find identity and there we can discover pleasure and belief, and on the other we can produce separation and there we will find desire and knowledge.

The lesson I hope to draw from this detour through psychoanalysis is that the separation of which Brecht talked always takes place there where there is an identity. The political question becomes then one of locating an identity which must be separated out so that it can become an object of knowledge. In order to understand this question it is necessary to turn to another central concept of epic theatre – the gest. Benjamin defines the gest in terms of interruption – the freezing of a moment so that instead of looking at things we have to examine the relationship between them. Benjamin writes of the gest: 'The damming of the stream of real life, the moment when the flow comes to a standstill, makes itself felt as reflux: this reflux is astonishment. . . . But if the stream of things breaks against this rock of astonishment, then there is no difference between a human life and a word. In epic theatre both are only the crest of the wave. Epic theatre makes life spurt up high from the bed of time and, for an instant, hover iridescent in empty space. Then it puts it back to bed'.

Benjamin's characterisation of a word and a human life as the same for epic theatre serves to emphasise that epic theatre breaks with that identity given to a life in the course of the actual flow of experience, or to a word in the flow of speech, in order to make clear that their identity can only be defined through a set of differences – the relationships that define them. The gest, then, is a set

50 of relationships revealed by an interruption. But these relationships will only serve to astonish insofar as they have first been subsumed under an identity. In other words it is when the world of pleasure and belief is interrupted that we set up desire and knowledge but it is necessary to start there where there is an identity in order to achieve the separation. The suicide of a young worker, the prostitution in the council flats in the suburbs of Paris, the sequestration of a boss – these are the social events which provide a crystallisation of the social forces we want to analyse. These indeed are the gestic, but if we film them in such a way that we allow identification – that we allow the spectator to sink into homogeneity with the image – then the gestic will be lost. Thus, for example, the suicide of Mutter Krause becomes the chance result of not getting the money in time, the loss of a young life becomes accidental instead of the deliberate historical act of the young Bönike. In order that the spectator learn to delineate the web of relations which constitute the gestic it is necessary to conduct a constant struggle against the world of pleasure and belief which collapses the differences of knowledge into an identity. Thus in *Kuhle Wampe* the death is made explicable in historical and political terms through the use of the written title 'One Unemployed Less'. The petty-bourgeois snares of *Kuhle Wampe* are demonstrated through the separation of sound and image in the Mata Hari sequence. Again, the threat of an idealised nature to a real understanding of the social situation is made clear in the astonishing tension between sound and image in the sequence of the Song of Spring. In *Tout va bien* the sequestration is demonstrated as the crystallisation of a set of social forces not through identification with the struggle – which we never see – we never go to the mass meeting, we're never there at the strike – but through the montage of events. If the other films separate out the matters of expression paradigmatically, vertically, as it were, *Tout va bien* attempts to demonstrate them horizontally, syntagmatically. It is the repetition of shots that reveals the mechanism to us. Thus as the strikers sit round discussing the significance of their actions the film gives us a montage of events – giving them their historical significance – and it is this montage which isolates the significant features of the occupation and articulates them in a way that makes clear their relationships. It is this learning which is the central point of the film – the education of the strikers, the education of Fonda and Montand, the education of us in the cinema. We must learn to say 'I' historically – to understand that 'I' not as the punctual subject of a set of actions; eating, sleeping, going to the cinema but as the crystallisation of a set of differing social relationships. What I want to advance as a thesis is that the choosing of the gestic and its specific filmic articulation are one and the same movement. It is not that there is the selection of a political event and then the attempt to render it artistically. There is the starting point in the everyday

reality of the newspaper report that inspired *Deux ou trois choses* and *Kuhle Wampe* (*Kuhle Wampe* was inspired by a newspaper report about the suicide of a young worker, *Deux ou trois choses* by a magazine story about prostitution in the council flats around Paris), or a new worker's tactic which is investigated in *Tout va bien* and there is the transformation of this reality until it begins to reveal its configurations – until it can be appropriated as knowledge.) Thus it is not that *Mutter Krause* has the right political idea and the wrong filmic practice: the incorrectness of the filmic practice tells us that the political position upholding it is one of the wickedness and evilness of capitalism but this is a position that exactly lacks the possibility of understanding capitalism in such a way that it can be transformed either artistically or politically. Similarly, if we take the mythical film-maker that I postulated at the beginning separating out rigorously the five matters of expression, it is exactly insofar as he understands cinema as separate from the other sites of the class struggle that he can imagine a completely autonomous 'spectator' who will find an identity simply by sitting in a cinema. That the majority of those not directly concerned will find only boredom simply shows that boredom is a political reaction which must always be analysed and understood. It is exactly insofar as the separation of the elements does not involve a prior identity that the spectator can remain completely uninvolved by the process on the screen. This feeling of uninvolvedness constantly harassed by a process which is perceived as process but nothing else, can be experienced as boredom or threat. In either case the fact that there was not enough of a bribe of identity there in the first place will ensure that resistance can operate to further encase the subject in the world of belief. The nature of the pleasure and identity that must first be offered to the spectator is obviously not fixed for all time but will be dependent on the specific nature of the class struggle at a specific conjuncture and the specific intervention which the film is intended to make.

It is this problem of the audience which is crucial in trying politically to understand a film. If we think of the films by Oshima and Straub-Huillet that we discussed yesterday then it seems to me that there is a very strong divergence between them. Whereas once given the historical information about post-war Japan which any Japanese cinema-goer would automatically possess we can understand the political purpose of the Oshima film – we can begin to attempt to understand it as a political work – it is impossible to understand for what audience *History Lessons* was made. What is of importance here is not the film's popularity or availability – there is no reason to think that it is impossible to make political films for a very small audience (is not the most famous political intervention in our history – *Das Kapital* – exactly aimed at a small audience) but that to understand *History Lessons* you have to know

52 the Brecht novel and the Roman history independently of the film. To take simply the Fascist maps at the beginning of the film, the reflection on Fascism and Caesar might be more comprehensible if we could tell they were Fascist maps and not simply maps of the Roman Empire. Once all the surrounding material is understood it is doubtful to what extent the film remains a history lesson. Exactly the posing of the problem of address in the history lessons – from where and to whom – independently of a concrete process of learning historically is to fall into the trap of formalism in which the spectator can always remain inside the cinema. In his intervention yesterday Martin Walsh criticised *Dear Summer Sister* because people coming out of the cinema said 'what a nice movie that was', but he claimed a virtue for *History Lessons* in that if you didn't work at it you would become bored. The underlying assumption in that remark – that work is a good thing in itself – is part of the bourgeois ethic which is relatively well understood. The Marxist ethic and the Brechtian ethic is that you work because you have to. The only reason you have to work at *History Lessons* is because you are in a cinema – and practically nothing else. This is an automatic eliding of class positions – the replacement of the bourgeois spectator of the work of art. In *Dear Summer Sister* the work you have to do occurs at two levels independently of the specific problem of Japan and Okinawa. The first, at the level of filmic codes, is that one is constantly aware that one is watching a holiday movie – the blowing up from 16 mm to 35 mm and the over-exposure – and secondly the identification we are placed in is exactly one that involves us in incest. At the level of anecdote I would say that the people walking out of the cinema after *Dear Summer Sister* said that it was very nice but very strange – a holiday movie with a difference.

I hope I have said enough to support the position that in the question of film and politics, it is not politics or film but politics and film. Filmic questions are political questions and vice versa (one could recall emblematically that Eisenstein wanted to make a film of *Das Kapital*). I would like to demonstrate this position by taking the filmic weaknesses of *Deux ou trois choses* and analysing their political implications and to operate the reverse procedure with *Tout va bien*. I have said that a purely formal separation would be dependent on the conception of a simple autonomous spectator sitting in the cinema and that thus to extract the spectator from any class position is always to confer a fundamental homogeneity whatever its apparent breaks. The separation in *Deux ou trois choses* does to a certain extent remain on this formal level. If we take for example the repeated chords of the Beethoven music we can grant that a formal split is achieved between image and soundtrack but it is doubtful if this separation involves any interruption which will enable the spectator to study a set of relationships there where there had been an identity. I shall argue later

that this Beethoven music finds its motivation within a certain intellectualist tradition of cinema reading, but for the moment we can note that the formal nature of the separation is exactly that which enables the spectator to remain untouched by it – to remain mixed in. *Deux ou trois choses* still offers an aesthetic position to the viewer from which the formal operations can still be read as the tics of an original genius. If we return to Brecht's strictures against the integrated work of art we can remember that Brecht insisted that the spectator must not become a passive (suffering) part of the total work. It is this passivity which is encouraged by the formal nature of *Deux ou trois choses* and which finds its reverberations at other levels within the film. It is the passivity with which Juliette Janson confronts her situation – 'It's not my fault that I've got a passive side', it is the passivity with which the narrator announces that in the world of today revolutions are impossible, it is the passivity with which the spectator can watch the film and finally it is the passivity and acceptance which exactly provides the motivation for citing Beethoven's last string quartet, the work over which he had written the lines 'Must it Be? It Must Be'.

In order to understand the position of the film it is necessary to consider the two monologues delivered by Juliette's son Christophe. When Christophe recounts his dream we find ourselves in that perfect world, the two twins, North Vietnam and South Vietnam, where the symbol is completely defined and exhausted by the thing symbolised – where words and things are completely co-extensive – in other words exactly in that world of pleasure and belief where there is no difference, no separation, no knowledge. That he is still in the plenitude of the infant world (*infans* = unable to speak) is made clear by the question he next asks his mother 'Mummy what is language?' The next time we see him his discourse is no longer so transparent, we can hardly understand his essay on the theme 'There are both boys and girls at our new school this year, which means that our class is mixed. Is friendship between boys and girls possible and desirable, yes or no?' What is obvious, however, is that this lack of transparency has been brought on by the contact with difference – with the girls with whom he has started to go to school. The film places itself in much the same position as Christophe, hesitating between the comfortable world of belief and the difficult world of knowledge – hesitating in the moment of entering into language before the world of knowledge and desire it opens up – hesitating between the art cinema and the political cinema. Talking of this film Godard remarked that when one lifts up the skirts of a town one sees its sex. It is exactly that moment of the discovery of sexual difference on which the whole film hovers. *Deux ou trois*, Two or Three, the two of plenitude with the (m)other as the endless reduplication of an original identity, the three of the father which brings the

54 disquieting difference. The film, like Juliette Janson, is on the point of splitting, of separating, but hesitates there endlessly. She says: 'Now when I dream, I have the impression that I'm splitting into a thousand pieces. . . . And when I used to wake up, before, even when it took a long time, I'd wake up all in one piece. Now, when I wake up, I'm scared some of the bits will be missing.'

This hesitation is what enables the film to lag behind its own practice in a nostalgia for exactly the right relationship between sound and image – despite the demonstration of the fundamental heterogeneity of the filmic material, the film has still not ceased the search for a just image.

The political weakness of the film can finally be grasped through a consideration of its central gest – prostitution. The newspaper report is transformed from a shocking identity into a set of commonplace relationships determined above all by the need to consume. But it is simply as consumer – as passive – that the film attempts to grasp the social relations it investigates. Production is almost absent from the film and with it the contradiction which is immediately brought with production, with the class struggle. This emphasis on the passive consumer finds its counterpart in a residual humanism that informs the film. Talking about *Deux ou trois choses*, Godard constantly stressed prostitution as the typical state of our society. But exactly insofar as this view of prostitution as typical takes us away from the concrete conditions of the Paris suburbs, so it leads us towards a position in which all our individual souls are prostituted to the grand machine – rather than an understanding of the machine and its contradictions – rather than an understanding of our social relations. If then we take the film's relation to Vietnam we can notice these ambiguities. The distance from the Vietnam war is emphasised through the attention to the radio, and the juxtaposition of Lyndon Johnson's statements real and imagined brings out clearly (in a humorous way) the logic of the Americans' position in Vietnam. But to a certain extent this distance is simply seen as a problem to be surmounted – we must make sure, as Juliette Janson attempts to make sure, that our thoughts really do join us to the human beings on the other side of the continent. The concrete political activity through which we could bring our support to the Vietnamese finds expression only in the wall poster ('Vietnam – struggle – demand') at the end of the film.

Let us now turn to *Tout va bien*, exemplary in its posing of the conditions of its own production. Very much a Brechtian experiment, the film drops a couple of petty-bourgeois intellectuals whose lives had been changed by May 1968 into an occupied factory in May 1972. What are the effects of 1968 – what is the present disposition of forces in the France of today and therefore how do we struggle? The audience is constantly reminded that it is the struggle that matters – all attempts at identification, as in the sequence at

the end of the strike when we see Fonda and Montand working in the various positions of the workers, are beside the point, they are criticised in the film, because they leave us powerless. We must understand the struggle of forces and how it operates in our lives. The last section of the film exactly shows our two heroes learning this lesson. They both realise that they had made one change in 1968 and incorrectly taken that change as a given, final, fixed event; as Yves Montand says: 'We all thought that was the end but in fact it was the true beginning'. But if we consider the lessons they learnt from the struggle we can pinpoint the political weaknesses of the film. In the supermarket Fonda poses the question as to where to begin, to which the answer is, everywhere at once. This answer is politically incorrect and is not in any sense criticised in the film. To start everywhere at once is to ignore the necessity of analysis and of conscious intervention in the social process – it is in fact to ignore politics in favour of morals. Nor is this surprising if we consider the other feature of the first two 'Today' sequences (you will remember that there are three 'Today' sequences: him, her, and them together), and that is the total identification of the French Communist Party with the bourgeois order. Two basic social events are here taken as the *gest*, the identity to be resolved into relations: the first is the Communist Party's attack on the activities of Maoist groups at Flins in June 1968 and the second is the Communist Party's sale of their programme for popular unity – 'changer de cap' – in supermarkets in France. What is less important, in this context, than the punctual correctness or incorrectness of the positions, is whether one can agree with the *gestic* analysis that this reveals, that of the Communist Party's identity with the bourgeoisie. In other words it is not whether one actually thinks the film is right to criticise either the French Communist Party's attack on the activities at Flins, or whether the Party was politically right to make the sale in the supermarket, but whether those events are typical, in the sense that they reveal a complete homogenisation between the Communist Party and the ruling bourgeois order. Given this attitude to the Communist Party it is not surprising that politics is abandoned because the political arena is understood as a homogeneous area completely given over to the bourgeoisie. But the abandonment has effects at the filmic level. Simply to take the most obvious point we can see in this film a relative suppression of writing, exactly that which in *Deux ou trois choses* is heterogeneity. The only titles are 'May 1968', 'May 1972' and 'Class Struggle', together with the moral at the end of the film, but that is in some sense isolated, outside. Otherwise any writing is given diegetic motivation within the film. This suppression of writing finds its echo in the first report that we hear Jane Fonda read, in which she declares that the written press is dead. To give up this weapon in the heterogeneity of the cinema is to risk a lapse into a plenitude of the image – a fall into belief and away from

56 knowledge. This fall can be specified in the different positions of the monologues in the three groups in the factories. While we are constantly made aware of the site of the discourse of the boss and the CGT delegate – are aware of it, that is, as a specific articulation – the *gauchistes* are presented to us as the voice outside difference – the pure presence of truth. When Frédéric, the one with the moustache and the black sweater, speaks first to the camera, his mouth is hidden from us by the heads of the workers who surround him, his complaints are taken up by Georges, but with a voice over the image of him sitting with the other workers. Thus the specific site of the voice and its contradictions are lost as we hear the authentic voice of the working class. This lack of distance from the *gauchistes* is emphasised, at what I might call the theatrical, not the filmic level, by Frédéric's dress (the black sweater, the moustache), or by Georges, the old worker, that stereotype of the proletarian 'salt of the earth'.

This lack of distancing, this suppression of writing, the abolition of politics and theory has political results, and predictable political results. The inability to find one full expressive discourse, to find the word which endures and marks a slice of history, the word which Fonda is looking for, entails, if you cannot find an expressive discourse, a fall back into the expressive moment at which one beats up a foreman – a policeman – or a supermarket. If we think again of those two first 'Today' sequences, they both carry images of 'correct' political action which are not placed in any contradiction with the soundtrack. The first involves the moment when the two youths running from a policeman suddenly realise they can beat him up, and the second is when the band of young people ransack a supermarket. Both these incidents reveal a profoundly reactionary political position – a position very close to a fascist idealisation of violence. When the two youths turn on the policeman it is divorced from any concrete political situation in which the policeman is being used as an arm of the state in a particular area of the class struggle, rather it is presented as the typical situation of the policeman against youth. It is exactly the typicality of the situation which depoliticises it. Similarly, the ransacking of the supermarket is divorced from any political position other than that if you force people into a confrontation with the police it will make them revolutionaries – in fact it will make them prisoners.

We can focus the failures of *Tout va bien* most profitably in conclusion by a comparison of the final shots of the film with the final shots of *Kuhle Wampe*. Whereas in *Kuhle Wampe* the problem of change is put in terms of finding the objective force which will change the world – 'those who don't like it' – in *Tout va bien* it is still finally put in terms of changing one's subjective state. The list of pronouns which ends *Tout va bien* are all interchangeable with a punctual 'I' – 'Those who don't like it' are always caught

in a set of specific relationships, they represent an objective political force towards which one must take a position. *Tout va bien* appeals to the Maoist slogan 'Count on one's own energies', a slogan which means 'Count on the political energies of the particular group you are in', but in the film it is given an individual meaning, we are individually obliged, says the film to learn to say 'I' historically.

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Discussion

H: When I came out of *Deux ou trois choses*, I found that it made me think about *Mutter Krause* again, partly because of the question of prostitution which is raised in both. One of the political criticisms I had of *Mutter Krause*, and I think that a film which claims its politics are the politics of Socialism and Communism has to be criticised politically from that standpoint, is precisely its attitude to the woman question. Basically the question isn't raised in the film. Right at the beginning the girl and the lodger are introduced together united in the dance, and to that extent indistinguishable morally, except that the inter-titles tell us that the lodger is the morally dubious character whereas nothing is said about the girl; she's so inferior as to be morally privileged precisely because of that inferiority, the inferiority of not being thought about, almost, by the film-makers. (Laughter) And the option she's presented with in the film is either marriage, that is entry into petty domestic slavery and a form of legal prostitution, or prostitution itself. The marriage to the Communist is seen as the good alternative to prostitution and the lodger. Why is this the perpetual alternative? Obviously because her question hasn't been thought about, and a dominant bourgeois alternative has been accepted by the film-makers. In *Deux ou trois choses* Godard treats prostitution not perhaps in relation to the woman question, but in relation to sexuality. Yet what was absent was any critique of standard notions of female sexuality. We're presented with a very traditional view of sexuality which really ignores the problem, precisely woman as enigma, Freud's suggestion that the one question we'll never be able to answer is, what does a woman want?, the passivity, the dark continent that is never explored, and also a very classical Freudian conception of female narcissism. You discussed the politics of separation in relation to identification, so I should like to know how you see the conception of narcissism, because if you were talking about identification in psychoanalytic terms, then narcissism comes in as a problematic.

58 Colin MacCabe: If one understands narcissism as the situation before the separation with the phallus which leads to genital sexuality, then Marina Vlady is presented as exactly that passivity. She's not interested in sexuality, she says, 'One word to define me – indifferent'. The only thing she's interested in is, as it were, looking at herself in the mirror. But that seems to be exactly the position I was trying to criticise in the film, that because there's no concept of politics, there's no concept of female sexuality, both of which would be the step forward into, on the one hand, knowledge, and on the other, desire. Although the whole world of pleasure and identity is constantly criticised, the film never gets outside it, it hovers – precisely 'two or three things'. On the question of prostitution, Godard started from the astonishing report in 1966 that there were lots of women engaged in prostitution not because they were starving, the traditional, Mutter Krause reason, but because they couldn't afford the goods of consumer society. The weakness of *Deux ou trois choses* is that it turns this into a typical situation, typical in the traditional realist sense of identifiable with, not in the Brechtian sense of understood, concretely analysed. To get to the other sense, in the case of the woman, would be through the idea of production, through a further investigation of what the husband does and of the woman's role in the house. Of course these things are in the film – you see her doing the dishes, putting the children to bed, you see him at the garage, and Juliet Berto makes his position clear when after he says 'I've been working at my garage' she asks 'Do you own it?' and he says 'No' – but it needs to be much more thoroughly investigated, and it's precisely insofar as for Godard prostitution becomes 'we are all prostituted' that *Deux ou trois choses* fails.

I: Although Godard was interested in politics before 1968, the films he made then aren't films which attempt to articulate themselves around a political line. Watching them I find myself returning to a very auterist approach to what he's doing. A film like *Deux ou trois choses* I really enjoy, but by pushing it into the previous era. The presence of that prostitution metaphor just seems to me a typical Godardism from all along, in fact from his most idealist period, say the time of *Vivre sa vie* which precisely poses prostitution as a central metaphor. This goes with the attitude he adopts in those early films to women as the enigma for men, as constant betrayers of his heroes. By the time of *Deux ou trois choses* this has not been criticised out. We are to a large extent in the world of the early Godard romance, although it's breaking up under the impact of Godard's absorption of Brecht.

CMcC: Yes, I think that's true. It's part of the hesitation. *Deux ou trois choses* does try to separate out from prostitution the set of relations which define the gest in terms of the way in which the city's organised, the way in which consumption becomes the only

possible outlet for desire. But I don't think it goes quite far enough, it hesitates between being an art cinema and being a political cinema. Your point about an inverse relationship between one's auteurist approach to the film signed by Godard and one's political approach relates to our previous discussions of collective work in the cinema, and becomes even more significant in relation to *Tout va bien*, signed by Godard and Gorin. It might be thought that the simple fact of collaboration was a way of breaking with the notion of the individual as the homogeneous creative source of the work, a way of introducing contradiction where there was unity and transforming creation (the effortless act of the will to produce light from nothing) into work (the practice, the transformation of the codes we find ourselves articulated along). But this simple view of collaboration ignores the possibility of a collective subject – of attempting to refine at the level of two or more exactly that homogeneity and unity that characterises the individual creator. What is determining in the division between on the one hand creation, unity and homogeneity, and on the other work, contradiction and heterogeneity is exactly political – the question of class (the question of the social relations of production which transform every individual from a punctual subject into a set of contradictory practices). It is this commitment to politics which must be read in Godard's collaboration with Gorin. Whereas *Deux ou trois choses* is exactly a cinema hesitating between an art cinema (an author's cinema) and a political cinema, *Tout va bien* is an attempt to make a political film aimed at a specific audience in France in 1972.

Martin Walsh: You called me a puritan yesterday, and if I gave that impression, fair enough. I think the significant thing about *History Lessons*, what the car sequences do, is to enable one to participate in the production of meaning. It's work in that sense, it's a participatory thing, there is an active engagement rather than a passive reception.

CMcC: Yes, that's of course what one wants, but work can never be posed in an abstract sense. There must always be reasons why you have to work. In *History Lessons* the only reason I can see I'm given to work is that I'm in the cinema. That seems to me to be exactly a certain formalism, it is to separate out the methods of representation from representing anything.

J: What's at stake is the bourgeois work ethic, a philosophy that Brecht criticises at the beginning of *Kuhle Wampe*, when he has the worker saying to his son 'It's your own fault you're not working'; the point is not that work is a bad thing, that one needn't work, but that there's a bourgeois ethic that anyone who fails to work is a failure in the society of the bourgeoisie.

MW: No, I think my general orientation was more to the elimination of the bourgeois distinction between work and leisure which we find in Brecht as well as Straub, and to the establishment of

60 a very active engagement between the audience in the cinema and what is on the screen, an active work of deciphering meanings and so on. Last night when Straub was talking about the car sequences, one of the reasons he gave for their existence was that anybody who cannot watch those car sequences, who cannot engage with activity in the street, cannot have an advanced political position. CMC: But what is the analysis that supports that? My point was not that one shouldn't do work, but that if people work in the cinema, it's because they have to. A film captures its audience partly through identification, through belief, and then separates out and makes clear relations where there was an identity. What I criticise about Straub is the fact that the work finds no basis, the original identification finds no basis other than sitting in a cinema.

E: When discussing learning, which I presume applies to knowledge and not belief, you seem to talk always in terms of the signified rather than the signifier. Could it not be that in Straub, in *History Lessons*, the knowledge is perhaps on the side of the signifier? Could you say a bit more about your critique of formalism in this light?

CMC: Formalism here would be exactly that which allows a certain unity to cover all the contradictions, the unity of being a cinema spectator in the cinema. The cinema is there independently of any other position the spectator might be in, the film ignores the spectator insofar as he is not cinematic. The Brechtian idea is to take something which we all know about, as we all know about Caesar, and then deconstruct it into a set of social relations so that we don't in fact know all about Caesar. Although the questions of address are there, Straub's film doesn't do this.

E: But that's precisely where you're putting the knowledge on the side of the signified, in saying it's about Caesar. I would say that the film, which I regard as much more important than *Tout va bien*, is far more about Rome; it raises the whole problem of Rome and the series of different signs which one has of it, the signs of antiquity, the signs of history. The fact that ancient Rome becomes so to speak an ideal sign, a sign on the level of connotation within the culture in which we live now, is then revealed as having an economic base. You learn something about history which you would never ever learn from *Tout va bien*, which is completely frozen out of history. Of course that is still the signified. But what is essential to all the Straub/Huillet films, is something which he spoke about himself, the layers. Essentially his films are like palimpsests in which you have different layers of history and commentary and so on, and the relations between those layers.

Alan Lovell: I don't see that you're talking about the signifier any more than Colin MacCabe was. It seems to me extraordinarily difficult to talk about the signifier.

CMC: You can't ever talk about it as such, you can't get an

identity on it, it's exactly the demonstration of relations.

E: But those relations are very clearly of the signifier – different kinds of shots, different kinds of profilmic event, different kinds of historical denotations and connotations and so on. There's a much more complicated play of relations between different kinds of shot, different kinds of camera positions, and so on, in *History Lessons* than there is in *Tout va bien*.

CMcC: Yes, there are only two types of shot in *Tout va bien*. But if you want to talk about the signifier in that sense, what is that if not the demonstration of the camera?

E: You say either its form is just about the camera or its form is just about Rome. What I'm trying to say is that in order to talk about the film at all you have to talk about the relationship between that play of differences which you can call formalist by attaching it purely to the camera and that play of differences which you can call contentistic by attaching it purely to 'it's about Rome' or 'it's about Caesar'.

AL: Colin, what possible evidence is there that the audience at the cinema is a unity?

CMcC: I actually said that the audience was heterogeneous.

AL: All right then, the individual. As I understand it your argument goes that there's a unity induced in the individual man, not the audience. How can you know there's that unity?

CMcC: Because it's inscribed in the film.

AL: But surrealism, for instance, finds in all kinds of art precisely disruptions. Why do you choose one position as opposed to another? I'm suspicious of this endless assumption that the popular audience is a passive audience.

CMcC: I think one would have to argue about particular popular audiences in particular situations. The popular audience in, say, Western Europe since 1948-9 has to a large extent been a passive audience and one can see that from what is inscribed within the films made for that audience.

AL: Is that based on the fact that there hasn't been a revolution in Western Europe?

CMcC: On that, but also on the way one can find that passivity in the works, in the sense that Brecht talked about, which is that there is not the separation of the elements, and the most important thing which remains unseparated, which means passive and suffering, is the spectator.

Brecht in Britain – Lindsay Anderson
(on *If . . .* and *O Lucky Man!*)*

Alan Lovell

My task is a relatively simple one – to describe and analyse the effect of Brecht and the ideas embodied in his work and thinking on British culture, and specifically the British cinema. Before I go on to do that, I should like to indicate certain points which underlie the analysis and description that I make of Brecht's impact on the British cinema.

First the interest of Brecht himself, the playwright. It seems to me that for a socialist the special interest of Brecht is the way he accepted a tension, which is probably one that any artist working in our kind of society faces, between on the one side a mass audience to whom you inevitably want to say something, towards whom you want to direct your work, and on the other hand an avant-garde art, which again you're interested in, but whose techniques seem, if you adopted them in your work, to cut you off from the mass audience. I think these tensions are particularly strong for a socialist artist, because he's blocked both ways. He can't accept the mass audience unproblematically, he can't say he'll give the audience what it wants, and accept as sovereign the audience's demands and desires as indicated to him. He must have a critical relationship towards that audience or the representations of that audience that are actually made to him (because obviously there are real problems in knowing what an audience for the popular cinema, for example, wants). On the other hand he can't stick within the avant-garde, because he must be aware of the class situation and cultural limits of working within the avant-garde that exist in our society. So he lives with those tensions. The great interest of Brecht is that he accepted the tensions, his work is

* The general remarks that form the opening section of this paper were rather hastily improvised in an attempt to open up a debate about the position on Brecht that previous papers had taken. This meant that their formulation was not as fully worked out as it might have been. The addition of these remarks also meant that the rest of the paper had to be compressed. I'm particularly sorry about the brevity of the discussion of *If . . .* and *O Lucky Man!*

pulled in both directions, but he never refused the pull of either side, where a much more characteristic experience is to collapse one way or the other and no longer accept the 'pull' of the tensions. In that sense I think he is of particular interest to socialists.

The second point which underlies my attempt to deal with the British situation is the problem of popular entertainment in a capitalist society. There I particularly want to engage with the notion of the audience being passive, the ideas of how far an audience works, how far it leaves its mind behind in the cinema. I think again any socialist has to regard notions of the audience not working and being passive with great suspicion. It's a familiar theme in cultural criticism, a theme both of socialist and high bourgeois thinking about the arts: the notion that the audience, the mass audience, the audience for cinema and radio, for popular magazines, for television, is passive and simply accepts without any active response, accepts what's given it. In the case of high bourgeois positions, this leads to the idea that the masses are degraded and towards authoritarianism, the kind of ideas associated with T S Eliot, for example. In socialist criticism I'm not sure it doesn't come to a rather similar kind of position, the notion that, simply because they have been defined as passive, the masses have to be manipulated, used by intellectuals or the party. Therefore I think one has to be sceptical about any account which sees the audience as passive.

It's striking how in these accounts certain ideas constantly repeat themselves. For instance, I was surprised at the emphasis Colin McCabe put on reading and language in film, and what it evoked, a very old criticism of the cinema which again used the image of the passive audience, the criticism that cinema was passive simply because it was unmediated. The audience just saw things, they saw the world through the cinema; it wasn't in any sense a coded form, things were simply put there before them and they saw them — they had to do no work. This was contrasted with the notion of reading, language itself being an abstract form needing work. Reading therefore became of great importance for the criticism of the cinema, since it showed up inherent deficiencies of the cinema, and the necessary passivity of an audience that engaged with pictures. This is essentially a criticism of pictures and it refers back to an account of the cinema that Stephen Heath discussed, talking about photographs. This is a position I think one also has to regard with scepticism. It seems to me that the process of understanding films, how we respond or read, whatever term you actually use, is almost completely not understood. As far as I know there is no real account at all of the way an audience engages with a film, or any art works for that matter. A lot of assumptions are being made. The political issue should be brought out quite clearly. I think this notion of the audience and the way that it receives art is very important in the way Brecht has been used in recent political

64 accounts of art. Nearly all Marxist accounts of art over the last ten years or so have started from the question Colin raised: why hasn't the Western working class rebelled since 1945, why hasn't it radically changed society? Since it can't be claimed that the working class has been held in position by guns, by the police or the army, the answer has increasingly been ideology. I think we should ask how far this notion of ideology has any force, whether it is any more than an acknowledgement of the fact that society hasn't changed, simply an acknowledgement of that political fact.

The third thing, which bears on the question of art in a capitalist society, is the question of the kind of pleasures we get: and a warning against trying to capture cinema too quickly for political interpretations. I was struck by this partly in relation to the discussion of Straub yesterday, more strongly in relation to Godard and particularly the things not said about Godard. One of the things that seem very striking about a film like *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* is Godard's use of poster colours, and of slabs of colour. I can acknowledge the existence of that kind of formal element in the film and feel that I'm responding to it without being able to give any kind of account of that response and making any sense of it in political terms which don't seem glib and obvious. Another example with Godard is the quite striking use of editing in his films: he attempts to abandon cutting on dramatic action so you follow the flow of the narrative, and adopts instead a kind of postcard technique of cutting, setting up pictures as it were against each other without a dynamic movement from one frame to the next. Again, I think it is very difficult to interpret that in political terms. Another thing is the destruction of space, the way Godard always works towards two-dimensional effects in his films. I want to hold these features as problems for any political criticism and to warn against easy interpretations of them.

One final preliminary remark: I want to suggest that all films, not just the work of particular directors, are contradictory, confused, work in different directions, have tendencies that don't seem to go together and so on. The idea that most works of art or a very large number of them are homogeneous seems to me wrong. I'll come back to that problem when I talk about the Anderson films. It seems to me very important for socialist criticism to try to define what are the kinds of characteristic stresses and strains, areas where films work, areas where they don't work, not simply at the level of one film, but where they repeat and recur in numbers of films, and to try to have some kind of map of the cinema locating where certain things recur throughout groups of films, and relate that to the known audiences for those films. This would be a kind of criticism which would be more actively interested in the whole of the cinema and not, as it seems to me a good deal of the discussion we've had here is, pushing certain areas right outside critical interest, defining them as of no great interest because they

have a unity, a homogeneity.

These are some of the ideas behind what I'm trying to say about the British situation, and I'll make some of them more specific when I come to talk later about Anderson. In discussing Brecht's effect on Britain, I think that first one should make a distinction. It is too easy to make it seem that the only person who had any interesting ideas was Brecht. The British situation in the 1930's reveals the fallacy of this. Brecht himself, his work, don't seem to have been known except marginally; he wasn't effectively present on the English cultural scene. His plays were hardly produced, and he wasn't someone people automatically referred to. But the ideas that Brecht was interested in and which structured his thinking and writing were present within the English cultural scene. There was an active interest in the relationship between art and politics, which raised the question of popular theatre. There was an active interest in the relationship between art and education, art and instruction. There was an attack on naturalism in the theatre and an attempt to use verse. There was an attack on naturalism in the cinema. Examples one can point to are the work of Auden and Isherwood, *The Ascent of F6* and *The Dog beneath the Skin*. (Brecht did in fact know of this work and when he conceived of a conference of sympathetic cultural intellectuals, Auden was one of the names he put on the list.) In the cinema one can cite films like *Coalface* and *Night Mail*, both of which produce the kind of separation of elements that Colin was talking about yesterday in relation to Brechtian practice and naturalism within the cinema. Poets like Auden help with commentary, composers like Benjamin Britten write music; there is a concern to give weight to other elements in the film apart from the picture and not simply to see the picture as dominant and sound track and music as elements supporting it. *Coalface* is even more striking in its use of choruses and its attempt to present information about the situation of miners and coal industry in the 1930's. I think Brecht would have found it a very interesting work, but he probably never saw it. Also in the thinking of John Grierson and his attempt to relate art to education and instruction you can see similar themes to those which animated Brecht's thinking. So Brecht was not much present in Britain in the 1930's, but the ideas that interested him were. I say this because apart from trying to demystify Brecht, and to avoid the idea that Brecht was the only guy who had those ideas, I think we should not fall into easy assumptions about the impoverished nature of British culture as inevitably cut off from all the interesting ideas.

Most of these ideas seem to have disappeared between 1945 and 1955, except for the attack on naturalism in the theatre which was maintained, but without political dimensions, in the work of playwrights like T S Eliot and Christopher Fry and the attempt to introduce verse drama. Now insofar as it is possible to give a clear

66 date, all this changed in 1955 with the visit of the Berliner Ensemble. From that moment on Brecht and his plays became known and played a very active part in the British theatrical and cultural scene. The change here is very closely marked by the work of Raymond Williams; he wrote a book in 1952 called *Drama from Ibsen to Eliot* concerning that attack on naturalism in the theatre, the use of verse and so on. It has no reference to Brecht and there isn't a strong political dimension to the book. When it was extensively revised in the 1960's it was retitled *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* and Brecht was now strongly present in Williams' thinking about the theatre.

From 1955 onwards Brecht is also present in the English professional theatre. His ideas were very actively discussed, principally in the independent or 'radical' theatre magazine *Encore*. This discussion penetrated to the practice of production and Brechtian methods were used, particularly in the work of Royal Court Theatre directors like William Gaskill and Lindsay Anderson. And then playwrights made various experiments using Brecht's methods: John Osborne in plays like *Luther* and *The Entertainer*, Robert Bolt in *A Man for all Seasons* or John Arden. Brecht is also present in the work of Joan Littlewood, but I think she should be put to one side, because Theatre Workshop always was a political theatre and seems to have maintained contacts with Brecht and the kind of theatre he represented much earlier than 1955; the ideas that came with the appearance of the Berliner Ensemble in Britain and the translations of Brecht were not new to Joan Littlewood and the company she worked with because of their political connections.

It is not for me to try to assess the impact of this presence on the theatre. On the whole it seems to have been disappointing, generating techniques which remained techniques, divorced from Brecht's ideas. This is a question that might come up more in Pete Mather's discussion tomorrow.

However, there is an effective presence of Brecht and his ideas in British culture, but in relation to the British cinema no presence at all, except in a marginal way I'll specify in a moment. When we were preparing for these seminars we set out to see all the films where it seemed there might be some influence. There was all this work in the theatre, and the theatre fed through into the cinema, in the sense that directors like Tony Richardson moved from theatre to cinema work, Anderson moved between the theatre and the cinema, actors moved across, writers moved across. But the films were a dispiriting experience; we could find no connections, just an absence. All the issues posed by the interest in Brecht didn't seem present in the British cinema at all.

There are a number of reasons for this as far as I can see. The first is the basic conservatism of the British cinema. It is very important how the documentary movement cut off the experimental

direction of the British feature cinema. In the 1930's all the experimental work, going back now to films like *Coalface* and *Night Mail*, was done within the documentary movement, which became quite separate from the feature industry, with little interplay between the two. This let the feature cinema off the hook and it's never had that area for experiment that other national cinemas seem to have. This is strengthened by the fact that the British cinema has been heavily centralised in a monopoly form whereas cinema in France, say, has been much more anarchic in terms both of producers and of distributors and exhibitors. Here you have the dominance of the ABC and the Odeon and a very centralised situation, much more analogous to the one that applies in the United States, but without the volume of American production which did allow a certain play.

The second reason seems to be that Brecht was really present in British artistic culture as a theatre man. There were very few ideas about Brecht's relationship to the cinema. There was very little artistic thinking about Brecht's ideas which might have related it to other artistic forms. Even directors who in the theatre were actively interested in Brecht could go into the cinema and forget about that interest – which seems to have been the case with Tony Richardson for example.

The third reason for Brecht's absence is that the way British feature cinema was being thought of at that time did not seem to have much to do with Brecht's ideas. There were two themes in thinking about British cinema at that time (where cinema thinking has any kind of political dimension to it). One was the need to make the working class present in the cinema in a respectable way. Either the working class didn't exist at all or if it did it was as comic characters not to be taken seriously, knowing their place and so on. Hence there was a large effort to represent the working class more substantially seriously, which pushed towards a kind of sober naturalism such as you get in films like *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* for example. This did connect up with Brecht a little, because one of the things which was taken from Brecht was the notion of a more precise style of acting. Karel Reisz said it was one of his ambitions in using Albert Finney in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* to get that kind of purified naturalism, to lose the blur of conventional naturalistic acting. Thus Brecht had a little influence, but the interest was much more in a fair representation of the working class.

The second point where Brecht didn't seem to lock into the cinema, and this I think raises substantial problems about how one can use Brecht, is in the question of popular entertainment. This was a strong theme, particularly in the writing of Lindsay Anderson and his effort to relate his cinema criticism to his political ideas, the notion that a cinema could be developed that would appeal to a large mass of people without being simply conformist. This has

68 a critical dimension to it and seems very close to Brecht and to my first introductory point about Brecht's acceptance of that kind of tension for the artist. But while Brecht accepts that tension in his playwrighting, it seems to me that his thinking about it doesn't go very far and isn't very helpful. He never really investigated the notions of popular entertainment in the theatre and by implication in the cinema in any very substantial way.

Let me give some indications of the problems in Brecht's thinking. There seem to be two concepts of entertainment or pleasure in art in Brecht. One is the pleasure you get from learning. It is simply assumed that you get pleasure from learning, that it's automatic. I think it is obvious that there are a variety of ways of learning some of which are not pleasurable at all, but Brecht tends to assume that all learning is pleasure. It seems to me this is partly because his idea of learning was that of learning skills and techniques; you get a pleasure from learning a technique or a skill, from watching a craftsman at work. This relates to his use of sport as an image of the audience attitude he wanted to transfer to the theatre, the idea that you go to a boxing match, sit back smoking and admire the skill of the boxers. What this loses entirely is the tremendous emotional involvement you get in sporting activities, in boxing for example, in which you are totally caught up in the spectacle, and appreciation of skill is secondary. It is after all a common complaint about British soccer that spectators want their side to win, even if skill has to be sacrificed to win. This raises questions about Brecht's notion of Aristotelean theatre and his rejection (ambiguous though that rejection was) of emotional involvement. The other notion of pleasure Brecht had in relation to the theatre was a typical high bourgeois one, I mean that of pleasure as a drug. This is an image he uses frequently, pleasure as a drug-induced hypnosis. A great deal of art could be dismissed as of no interest since the spectator was prevented from using his mind in the theatre. Brecht never actually had to work within an economic, social situation which would have forced him to think about these problems in a substantial way. His persistent reference-point in talking about drugs is the bourgeois theatre, a position he developed in the 1920's, pitting his own kind of theatre against the conventional bourgeois theatre of that time. He therefore didn't have to think of the relationship between the pleasure as a drug, hypnosis and a working-class audience. His thinking focussed on a middle-class audience which could happily be dismissed as of no great interest. He never had a sustained confrontation with working for a mass audience, a large part of which was working class. Around 1930 his situation was one of which most contemporary artists have no experience at all, a very active working-class cultural movement into which an artist could insert himself, but that lasted a very short time, perhaps four or five years; then came the years of exile with no very clear economic or social situation to

relate himself or his work to, and finally the rather special case of East Germany in the post-war years. The period when the problem might have come out was when he was in America in the 1940's where he faced what are conventionally defined as the clearest examples of the drug-induced kind of pleasure in the American cinema, but he never got substantially involved in that cinema for reasons that Ben has already discussed in his paper, and it seems to be very much open to discussion whether it was ultimately a theoretical decision not to get involved in that cinema, or just a matter of personal circumstances, of not being able to find a position within it.

However, it seems to me that there is no doubt Brecht has no very clear ideas to bring to bear on the problems of an artist-like Lindsay Anderson, who's trying to work within popular forms in a capitalist industry like the cinema, which is committed to the entertainment of large numbers of people, and in that sense he wasn't particularly relevant. This is an emphasis that Anderson, and outside the cinema artists like Joan Littlewood, John Arden and Margaretta D'Arcy, have brought into thinking about art and into ways of performing rather than theorising. This is an important contribution that British artists have made, and it needs to be taken more seriously than it has been. One sad thing in the present situation is the generally negative attitude to British culture which leads to positive things in that culture being completely lost, and has an effect on the artists themselves, isolating them and preventing them from developing.

One thing to be said about Anderson's work immediately is that it is a great achievement simply to have got that work produced within the cinema, work which isn't straightforwardly naturalistic but raises problems about conventions and so on. And for any socialist working in the cinema that achievement has to be respected and taken seriously, because how you get control of the means of production which will allow you to speak to large numbers of people is an absolute and crucial problem. In *If . . .* Anderson found a form which had a large cultural resonance. *If . . .* is a film about a public school, but it's not naturalistically so, because what *If . . .* plays with persistently is the notion of the public school as a particular cultural form – as an actual educational and social institution, but also as an imaginative form generated by novels like *Tom Brown's Schooldays*. For instance, the shots of the school and the chapel follow very closely the style of the illustrations in works like *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, the titles follow the chapter headings of books of this kind, even the story of the horrors of public school is very close to the public-school genre. At the beginning of *If . . .* there is a constant interplay between what seemingly would be a narrative form and what would be a documentary form, and the audience has to wait to find which will dominate, which takes us back to a formal effect. It is like a juggler with two balls, the

70 sense of skill, of keeping things in the air, of knowing as it were when you are going to stop the act. This is one of the ways the film works, and it's not easy to discuss such an artistic effect in political terms.

However, that's not the only thing in the film, and I want to go back to what I said before about films consisting of inconsistencies, contradictions and confusions which film criticism ought to be sensitive to. I'd like to talk about *If . . .* from this perspective. There are four areas in the film that need to be taken into account. The first is the description of a social process, a public school, the functioning of its authority structure. The description provides an almost exemplary case of Brecht's ideas. It is presented with a great deal of lightness and humour which vividly delineates the nature of the process. The second is an investigation of psychological tensions. This is a much more obscure area; things like homosexuality, personal display and conformity seem to be at stake but aren't clearly articulated. The lightness and humour are lost and the tone of the film becomes heavy, leading to humiliation and revenge becoming the main themes. The third area is the use of the public school as a metaphor for the state of Britain, the headmaster and prefects as analogous to the ruling classes and the boys as analogous to, if not the working class, perhaps the rebellious students (the film seems obviously influenced by the students' protests occurring at the time of its making). The metaphor is loose and not very penetrating, its relationship with the area of psychological tension not specified. The fourth area relates to surrealism, with an obvious *hommage* to Jean Vigo. It seems quite extraneous to the film, though a full criticism would have to deal with it.

How all these areas work and how they relate to each other need to be assessed in coming to terms with *If . . .* And the assessment would have to be related to the kind of audiences the film got.

O Lucky Man! is a less confused and less productive film than *If . . .* There seem to be two basic ways in which the film works, one of which is a failure, and that is the part which is closest to Brecht, the attempt to produce a kind of pilgrim's progress through the modern world, revealing its political and social nature. As the film progresses this pilgrim's progress less and less seriously structures the film in an effective way. Insofar as it has any kind of political relevance it is a very uncertain one. But there is another mode within the film, which I would call a comic mode and which seems to me of great interest. It begins just as a kind of critical caricature, for example the sequence of the strip-tease show that takes place behind the hotel, an obvious evocation of the ridiculousness of the world with reference to local politics, its hypocritical and inbred character. It is an easy comic effect with a critical point. As the film goes on it works towards more and more

of these comic effects, but pushed to the point that the critical edge, the sense that this is a critique of a particular social situation, is completely lost, and all you get is absurdity. One absurdity is piled on top of another absurdity until all you are offered is absurdity for itself. It is very hard to make any kind of judgement about the effects of this. Englishness is very important to it. There is a constant sense of English characters and the way they talk, the doctor and his heartiness, for example. But the absurdity is pushed all the time so that it goes beyond easy jokes at the expense of the bourgeoisie and absurdity becomes absolutely dominant – and not for any point that one can easily see. Towards the end it pushes towards the kind of grotesqueness associated with the theatre of the absurd, for example in the scene with the fires and meths drinkers. The film becomes preoccupied with British ‘dottiness’. The move from Jennings’ *Listen to Britain* to *O Lucky Man!* is an extremely revealing one.

Returning to the concern with popular entertainment, at the moment British cinema is one of the less interesting areas to work in in this respect, because it doesn’t exist. The really interesting area now is television. There has been a presence of Brecht in television. There have been production of Brecht plays, and playwrights like David Mercer and Dennis Potter have obviously been influenced by Brecht. But so far that interest has been pretty unproductive I think. The playwrights’ work seems to have been hamstrung on a ‘Jimmy-Porter’ structure of feeling. Their plays constantly reproduce the hero of *Look Back in Anger*, the man in great personal anguish who has great sexual problems and directs a great deal of his anguish towards women for reasons which are not very clearly specified in the drama itself. The tendency is towards a collapse of naturalism; one character starts in effect to soliloquise, while some kind of naturalist mode is maintained. As in the theatre, the effect of Brecht is not one of substance. In television one might profitably learn from Brecht’s use of history to get both distance and detachment and a cultural resonance. (In the theatre the work of John Arden and Margaretta D’Arcy makes a similar use of history in plays like *The Hero Rises Up* and *The Island of the Mighty*.) Rather than the direction pointed by Mercer and Potter’s plays or the mimic naturalism of Ken Loach and Tony Garnett’s work in such plays as *Cathy Come Home* and *Up the Junction*, the opportunities provided by the historical series on television should be looked at. There was a series called *The Regiment* which was principally concerned with the British Army in the Boer War. I’m sure Brecht would have appreciated the opportunity to handle such a subject—it’s not so far from the world of *A Man’s a Man* after all. It offered so many opportunities: the distance a historical subject provides; the excitement of an action film; an event that is generally familiar – in Britain at least (‘Mafeking has been relieved’); a moment in the history of imperialism

72 that is full of irony – a fight against British dominance that helped to make apartheid possible. It hardly needs saying that most of these possibilities were not realised in the series, but I see no reason why some at least might not have been.

Discussion

Colin MacCabe: I didn't say the image is inherently passive, because I don't think the image is inherently anything. What matters is how images are organised and how that organisation builds in a position from which you are invited to watch those images. In the dominant cinema that position is designed to provide the effect of passive watching. The emphasis on writing is of some interest here, precisely as one of the elements with which to disrupt that organisation. That writing by itself does not do this is made very clear in, say, *O Lucky Man!*, where the writing just follows the already organised sequence of images and in no way breaks with them, simply confirms them. So it's not a question of just putting in writing, but of how far a particular element of film is being used to break out of an organisation of film in which passivity is already inscribed. Thus the use of colour or editing in Godard's films are not separate from the other things going on in the films; they may be working on different levels but they all bring a certain effect to bear on the position of watching. It's not a question of finding a contradiction and saying, 'Ah, yes, this is good, where unity would be bad', because then contradiction functions just as unity functions. It's that of how far there's a whole series of elements coming into contradiction with a dominant way of looking. On 'pleasure as a drug', very often when Brecht talks about that kind of pleasure, his image is one of opium, and the idea is of something that locks the individual into himself. It's a pleasure which does not make us aware of our social relations, even in the very simple sense of realising we're sitting in a cinema with a lot of other people, but makes each one of us into a completely self-enclosed individual world. Brecht's idea is that there is a pleasure in which one is engaged with other people, which is the pleasure he wants to stimulate with his art, and then there's a pleasure which locks one into oneself, which is the pleasure he sets himself against, which he calls witchcraft.

Alan Lovell: I don't agree, or I'm certainly not persuaded that there's a position that the spectator is placed in by the dominant cinema. In the remarks I made about *If* . . . I tried to suggest that there isn't one. Actually, I think there are a variety of positions

offered, and I think it would depend a lot on the nature of the audience, its class and social situation, what positions are accepted. Stephen Heath: Yesterday you attacked, quite rightly I think, any idea that there is a popular audience which is absolutely passive, which just sits there receiving things dished out to it. There is no such thing as a work or a film which is absolutely homogenous. Whether it be Straub or Sirk or Ford or the makers of the *Carry On* series, there are going to be a certain number of contradictions in their work. What is at issue in the passivity thesis is not so much the absolute homogeneity of any film as the tendency to homogeneity, the fact that certain films tend to a homogenisation by the way in which they work on elements which they contain, elements which may well be contradictory and contain different social resonances. Brecht's work is against that tendency to homogeneity, that attempt to weld together a lot of disparate things. It's not that there is a set of spectators who are passive, but that there's a set of images, a set of ideological configurations which would tend to a making passive of the audience. The problems lie in the contradictory relation between the audience in its active social situation, in its class position, and the images presented, the degree of passivity and homogeneity which films attempt to create, rather than in some idea that the spectator is absolutely passive.

I: I would agree with Alan very strongly that there is a tradition whereby sections of the intellectual left have taken over this notion of the mass audience as passive and drugged, but I didn't get the impression that that was at all what Colin McCabe, for example, was saying. And the bourgeoisie didn't just attribute passivity to the mass audience, it initiated the modes of consumption of works of art which minimise active involvement for itself: that is the way opera is supposed to be watched, for example.

AL: All these reformulations seem to me to show is that you want to make the point slightly more cloudy. (*Laughter*) Stephen says 'tendency towards . . .' and now you say 'the bourgeoisie, not the mass audience'.

I: The 'tendency towards' is not a tendency within the audience, it's a tendency within the production of the work itself. I think it was misleading to introduce the opposition between mass and elite, and the class imputation that this is how members of the bourgeoisie treat a working class audience. As originally made, the point did not necessarily discriminate between the class origins, let alone the class positions, of members of the audience. Colin was talking about ways in which certain works of art reduce the amount of work the audience is invited to do, gloss over contradictions rather than exposing them, operate in modes whereby really rather extraordinary things are made to appear natural, which is classically part of the bourgeois realist tradition. To say this is not necessarily to say the popular or working-class audience is passive, certainly not that it's passive in the same way as a

74 bourgeois or elite audience is. The problem was posed at the level of the work itself, at the level of the kind of procedures typified within a certain form of cinema, particularly of Hollywood cinema, but which are also typical procedures of nineteenth-century realism. So in saying that the spectator is passive, Colin was not saying 'stupid, lazy, drugged, dopey, neurotic, unhappy spectator', but 'what kind of relationship to the work is produced?'

AL: Why did you use Hollywood cinema as your example? Why not choose the example of an avant-garde art? One of the things that's very clear is that if there's a position offered to you in avant-garde art, it's work. If you have to work, you know it's art. Sixth-formers, for example, know art is good art when they have to work, when certain kinds of satisfaction, the traditional satisfactions, are denied them. That raises the question of passivity and the work of the audience as much as the Hollywood cinema, but your instinctive reference is to Hollywood.

CMcC: That's what I was trying to attack yesterday; it's not a question of justifying art in terms of it being morally healthy to have to work, but of how far something which was taken as evident before suddenly becomes a set of things you can actually study, become separate from.

K: I feel it is a misunderstanding to psychologise Brecht's views in terms of entertainment and pleasure, as you have done. To take your example of the boxing match, you talk about excitement, but to psychologise here is like breaking the biscuit after the good meal of meat, and the meat in the boxing match is how the boxers box, how people do things. The form of how you do things is social, of course, but how you do it is also necessarily so; in other words, you can eat or drink or bring water from the well in a hundred different ways, but in the end the way you have to do it is asocial, and this is what's important in Brecht. It's the way he uses the actor, which is not another method of getting away from naturalism, on the contrary, if you talk with people who worked with Brecht, you find that whenever he tried to make his theories work on stage, in other words make things look less realistic or less natural, the effect was usually the opposite, for that is not the problem at all, the problem is that you are presented with somebody doing something which says more about the truth of that something than any expression in words. It doesn't matter what that somebody is doing, so long as he is doing something; the common feature is how people do things, whatever they are doing – eating, cooking, running, walking. This tells us more, has in it more truth than anything you or I can say.

M: I find it quite interesting to compare *Elektreia* with *If* . . . , partly because I have sat in Hungarian cinemas and heard popular audiences burst into applause at the end of *If* . . . which means it

can be an effective political metaphor outside its immediate context. Two years ago it was the popular film of the year in Budapest, and not for the audience of *Elektreia*, but for the popular audience of kids, first generation from the village.

AL: I think that's a very important point; you may feel a film doesn't work for you, but you have to accept the effect it has on a lot of people who do enjoy it.

M: And side by side with that, I see two men at a certain stage in life. There's Jancso looking back over his youthful idealist phase, passing through something very Stalinist, on his own admission, and not knowing now where he stands after 1956, how he relates to the fashionable cosmopolitan world, part of which comes through very strongly in *Elektreia*. And there's a sort of middle-class British daftness which is the equivalent to that which Lindsay Anderson seems to embody and which very few of us can cut ourselves off from. I don't see that you can deny that there's something very useful in being pushed into thinking about *O Lucky Man!* I think it's an abysmal failure, but if it's true that Anderson is a smug, bitter man, that's partly because, as one of our most important film-makers, he's taken on the British film industry over several decades, and yet only made three films. Why can't one sympathise with that side of one's predecessors in the British arts?

CMcC: That picks up something Brecht says, that it is an achievement to have got to a position where you can make a feature film of any kind. I believe that's incorrect. The screenings of *If . . .* and *O Lucky Man!* were the first to produce queues outside the cinema all this week, exactly because audiences want a certain reflection on the society they live in, and Lindsay Anderson is the only film-maker who gives it to them, but then all they're given is this smug superiority. In many ways it would be better if that film didn't exist, and they weren't getting that slight satisfaction.

AL: I don't want to defend *O Lucky Man!*, but I think you have to talk more seriously about *If . . .* and I can't understand why you don't put the same kind of critical weight on Godard. There's an enormous smugness in *Deux ou trois choses*, in the endless posing of questions about the world and language which are never followed up, which invites precisely that sense of 'this is art, we're being intellectual and dealing with profound questions'. I don't want to defend Anderson as against Godard, but nor do I want Godard to be taken with kid gloves and Anderson put great weight on.

CMcC: But I attacked Godard yesterday in my analysis of the film.

AL: Not to the point of saying it would be better that the film hadn't been made.

N: In view of what you said about the preconditions for a discussion of Anderson and British cinema, can you first of all say what was Anderson's intention in making *If . . .* and secondly who goes

76 to see *If* . . . and what do they get out of it?

AL: The intention, insofar as it can be established from the film and Anderson's statements, is to create a popular form of cinema that is successful for a large number of people, yet also to make a critical form, one that in some sense poses questions about society. What people get out of it is problematic. I've experienced audiences being tremendously involved and clapping and cheering at the end of *If* . . . , too. The problem is that one doesn't know about the reading process, how people really take films and what sense they make of them. As a film critic I say 'that doesn't work, that's a rather vulgar, rather crude and romantic image of politics', but nevertheless the fact is that lots of people do get very involved, cheer, and see it as a support for their political positions, which are not political positions to be simply dismissed.

Martin Walsh: But it is a political position absolutely distinct from Brecht in its emphasis. Both *O Lucky Man!* and *If* . . . are resolved by catharsis.

AL: But how could you know that the people who cheer and clap resolve it in catharsis?

MW: It's built into the structure of the film.

AL: That's just to assume that the structure of the film is automatically transferred to the audience, which is to imply their passivity. As we well know, from simple sociological investigations, people use films very much according to their own kinds of values and ideas.

N: I'm sorry but you didn't really answer my question about Anderson's intentions. What I asked was, what is Anderson's *political* intention in making the film, and in what way, if any, has he enlightened the audience?

O: Anderson made the film because he went to public school. Anything that happens Anderson demystifies through individuals, nothing else. He doesn't go into the politics of separation Colin MacCabe discussed yesterday, of finding out what it is that articulates relationships in society. All he says is, I went to public school, I was in a hierarchical organisation, so how do I break out of that?

AL: A socialist can't simply talk about Lindsay Anderson's psychological intentions, and then move on to a judgement on the movie. Maybe he is working out of autobiographical knowledge, but he's also working within a cultural context which is larger than his psychological experience. It's useless to ask, what is the real motivation behind *If* . . . You can talk about the film, but to psychoanalyse Anderson is just quite wrong.

N: You can certainly talk about his politics.

AL: That's right.

I: In discussing Godard yesterday we found recurrences in the films that related to the personality of the author rather than to the film's political aims, though they had political implications. In the case of Anderson it seems to me necessary to raise the

question of his intentions, also those of the scriptwriters incidentally, who wrote the original draft just after leaving public school and rewrote it about ten times before Anderson adopted it for *If*. . . . For the scriptwriters as well as the director it was a question of revenging themselves on a part of their upbringing. Why is public school of all things made an emblem of so much in British society? In the film one of the crucial things is that it represents Authority with a capital A; the film sets itself up very violently against that authority. Thus its politics is simply anti-authoritarianism. You have the same thing in *O Lucky Man!* – the establishment as authority in the form of ageing male figures, while the hero constantly lurches in the opposite direction towards maternal elder women. You can't talk about the films seriously without going into the presence of these things, but they don't constitute the 'real' in the films, but something which has to be raised.

AL: I accept that. The revenge theme is very strong in both films and so long as you don't see it as the real motivation, the secret of the movies, then it is a valid point.

Claire Johnston: It seems to me that the question we are constantly skirting around here is what do we mean by the 'socialist tradition' and 'working-class culture' and what is the task of the film-maker in relation to it. What you seem to be doing, Alan, is to pose these notions as somehow absolute and sacrosanct, so that it is not the task of film-makers to analyse or scrutinise assumptions behind them, still less of critics to point to the theoretical limitations underlying those notions. You seem to be speaking from the position of the critique of mass culture which came out of the work of Hoggart, Williams, Whannel and Hall and others in the late 1950's and early 1960's – possibly your own political formation as it is to an extent mine. Obviously this debate was enormously important in establishing the interest of popular culture in the face of the assumptions of high culture, but its theoretical limitations are now very clear, particularly in relation to the whole question of ideology. For instance, it's interesting that what was concentrated on was the notion of the artist in popular art rather than the question of textual production itself and the way meaning is produced at that level, the ideological configurations at work in the text – the relationship the work attempts to produce between text and audience. You seem to be suggesting that the mass culture debate is still more progressive than what we are attempting here, which is surely a romantic nostalgia on your part for the terms of reference that formed that debate. The importance of that intervention at the time is undeniable, but developments in film theory since then such as semiology have radically altered those terms of reference.

SH: But Alan was raising an extremely important problem, for there is a sense that in our position we can produce a dangerously easy account of *O Lucky Man!* and *If*. . . which will in a sense be right.

78 *O Lucky Man!* does have a fundamental organising ideology, and this is clearly expressed in the film's songs, the idea of up and down, changing places: the fundamental figure of the film is that of moving behind the door and seeing what's on the other side. You start in the front of the hotel, then you go behind and there they all are sitting watching their orgy. You stumble across a government building, you go in and there they are, doing something unholy in a nuclear laboratory. You are there in court, they all go out, and there is the judge being whipped behind the scenes. It's always going to be like that, the incidents will go on and on to confirm it. But as I say this is dangerously easy. Alan is right to insist that a different reading might be given by a different audience in a different situation. However, the real alternative is not between saying that the film is absolutely wrong and therefore of no use at all in any context (as was said recently by some extreme leftists in Paris who prevented the screening of some fascist films as part of a university course on fascism, on the grounds that they shouldn't be shown under any circumstances, they are totally wrong), and saying that we don't have to bother about analysing it, because it might mean anything to anyone, given a different situation. The real problem is the relation between the way in which *If . . .*, say, can crystallise and express a sense of revolt, which is the point about the cheers at the end, and the limitations on its potential use that the film itself produces. This also includes the question of the context, in social terms, in which films are shown, the way they are shown. We can't divorce thinking about a Lindsay Anderson film from thinking also of the cultural resonance of the kind of distribution it receives, which is an important and difficult point.

M: The last time I discussed *If . . .* was in the Balázs Studio in Budapest, where most people would articulate their position with, say, Lukács in mind, so there's a completely different sort of prejudice, they wouldn't accuse him, as we have been doing, of being stuck in public schools. We are reacting in an over-emotional way to Lindsay Anderson because of a very subjective tie-up in ourselves, while the new wave in Czechoslovakia in the 1960's and the young Lukácsites in the Béla Balázs Studio do have a very high regard for that film. Part of the distancing might just be the different nationality.

CMcC: But the fact that these film-makers think it's a great film might not so much make it interesting as represent a criticism of them, or of the film itself. Although there are important questions about what are the limitations of the use of a film, it doesn't seem to me to be at all surprising that everybody bursts into cheers at the end of *If . . .*, because that is inscribed in the film, which says, if anything, that Hungarian audiences are surprisingly close to us in the kind of codes they recognise and take up.

James Pettifer: You suggested in defence of *O Lucky Man!* that the pilgrim's progress aspect was Brechtian. I think it's very dangerous to postulate that the picaresque is a positive feature and has a real relationship to Brecht's epic techniques, which would mean that a film like *Tom Jones* is in some way Brechtian. The picaresque depends on the unity of the consciousness of the hero who's travelling along the road. In traditional English picaresque narratives, this has always meant a sort of dialectic of place: the hero goes along the road and something happens, then he goes a bit further along the road and something new happens. This is certainly the character of a lot of *O Lucky Man!* But there's nothing very epic about it, because it preserves a unity of time which is that of the consciousness of the main character and contains all the contradictions, the consciousness of Tom Jones or Michael Travis. If it's followed through it works against distanciation, against connecting guests with any objective reality outside the local circumstances in which the character finds himself. I think this is why *O Lucky Man!* was cut for example: long as it is now, it had to be cut quite considerably, both at the script stage and after it had been shot. In a certain sense the film would have no end until Michael Travis' death.

P: I think there are certain problems in talking about *O Lucky Man!* as a Brechtian film. There ought to be some cut-off point at which it's no longer useful to think of a film as being Brechtian. If there is an essential element in Brecht which would mark a film as Brechtian, it would be political, the film would have to take into consideration some notion of a dialectical process in society. *O Lucky Man!* and *If . . .* lack this totally, and if we don't take that into account we're only adopting certain stylistic features as a Brechtian technical system, which is a stylisation of the cinema and not Brechtian.

SH: I don't think we included those films because we thought they are Brechtian, the problem was precisely that of British cinema, the relations of that cinema to contemporary British history, the actualisation of that in the cinema historically. The interest of *If . . .* and *O Lucky Man!* was Anderson's Brechtian background, and the fact that he does talk of *O Lucky Man!* as a Brechtian film, in terms of alienation, epic theatre and so on. Our interest was not to say that these are Brechtian films but to raise precisely the problems of the divorce of the device from any kind of political, social, analytic relation in a film like *O Lucky Man!*

AL: Could you say what the dialectical process that you regard as essential to Brecht is?

Ben Brewster: Could I start to illustrate it by saying why I don't think that the demonstrative opening section of *If . . .* is Brechtian? It completely accepts an image of the public school which as you say derives from *Tom Brown's Schooldays* and all its descen-

80 dants, it doesn't in any sense distance it. These scenes reproduce, fundamentally in a naturalistic, documentary way, what we all know about public schools – that they have all these fags and rules and rituals that serve no function. They invert the values of *Tom Brown's Schooldays* so as to make us dislike public schools, but this inversion doesn't bring them closer to Brecht, but rather to a position like that of *Mutter Krause* demonstrating that the working class live in very unhealthy circumstances. To distance all these public school rituals you would have to do the opposite, to show how all this eccentricity is a part of the workings of British society, but the latter is only shown in the film in a fantastic way, you don't see the real society outside at all. Whereas in Brecht, when an action or gesture is isolated, that is in relation to the society, to its place in the total reproduction of social relations in the society in which that particular action or gesture takes place; Brecht's aim is to tear it out of its immediately apparent reality and insert it into this causal process. The first sections of *If . . .* never assume the proportions of a Brechtian gest. AL: I agree that *If . . .* doesn't have that kind of outside relevance, it's a depiction of a particular institution and somebody who isn't familiar with that institution will learn something about its nature. What I'm sceptical about is the weight you put on Brecht; the great problem about Brecht is that a lot of things are taken for granted. I think you would have to engage in substantial discussion of how far Brecht does the things you say that he does, but we can't do that here.

Q: It seems to me that for a seminar called 'Film and Politics' we're very much emphasising film, and assuming we all agree about politics, that there's some kind of vaguely Marxist consensus and we need not make any effort to explore what we agree about. At the beginning we did have some sort of historical-materialist analysis of the general problems of film and of Brecht's interventions at certain conjunctures; however, in later papers we have been given a more general aesthetic, an attempt to decant some kind of Brechtian essence out of films from Germany, France, Japan and now England, but we haven't really explored why, say, Straub or Godard made those interventions at those times, we've not attempted to make a historical-materialist analysis of those films in their national conjunctures.

CMcC: I agree that the politics are unclear to a certain extent, but the basis of this seminar is that one can work at a certain level of abstraction in order to obtain a certain understanding. Obviously there are divisions, but the work I think we have managed to do here this week wouldn't have been possible if the political questions had been pushed all the way. To take the work further would always be to divide, to make other contradictions appear.

Brecht in Britain: From Theatre to Television
(on *The Gangster Show*)

Pete Mathers

I would like to begin this paper by attempting something of a slightly extended redefinition of several of the points made yesterday about the relation between Brecht and British Theatre.

Alan Lovell spoke of there being no real presence of Brecht in the 1930's. This is to ignore a series of productions of Brechtian texts which seem to me to be of great importance. In particular it is necessary to note that Joan Littlewood and Ewan MacColl, working with Theatre of Action in Manchester, were using scenes from, at the least, *The Round Heads and the Pointed Heads* in 1935. This was specifically and unambiguously political theatre, performed on the backs of lorries at factory gates and other similar locations. Still within a political context, there was a production of *Die Massnahme* by the London Labour Choral Union in 1936, and in 1938 *Señora Carrar's Rifles* was performed at Unity; but it should be noted too that in 1933 there was a production of *Seven Deadly Sins* at Sadler's Wells, and in 1935 a performance of *The Threepenny Opera* on BBC Radio.

My second point would be to wish to clarify the actual level and tone of the 'active debate' that was going on in *Encore* in relation to Brecht. For it is necessary to realise and remember that it was almost exclusively centred on certain aesthetic criteria, on 'the technical elements of alienation'. Brecht's name crept into many reviews: Lindsay Anderson praised Avis Bunnage's combination of 'detailed naturalism' and 'eye-on-the-gallery caricature' in *A Taste of Honey* as 'real Brechtian playing', Marcorelles in turn saw Anderson's direction of such plays as *The Lily White Boys* and *Billy Liar* achieving a proximity to a Brechtian mise-en-scène, George Devine discussed the Ensemble in terms of its proximity to 'the agreeable chaos of an artist's studio' and Bornemann talked of how Brecht's theatre 'became a place of utter magic – but only for those who loved Brecht as a lyric poet and were sensitive to that inexplicable gift in him which transformed everything which he touched'.

These references went unchallenged, and they do indicate some-

82 thing of the way that since the 1956 visit of the Berliner Ensemble it has been possible for the dominant theatre practices in this country to integrate into their work what they regard as aspects of characteristically Brechtian playing. Aspects which extend beyond the simple presentation of Brechtian texts to certain notions both of form and design which have found integration where the ideological orientation and commitment remains firmly within notions of the distinctness, the discreteness of the individual and the impenetrable aesthetic object. A certain aesthetic of design, which, although to some extent internally developed – by, for example, Jocelyn Herbert and John Bury – depends heavily on the Brechtian model, dominates the major subsidised companies.

This process of appropriation – accurately described by Manfred Wekwerth (one of the Ensemble directors) – ‘Brecht’s theatrical devices, invented to destroy social and theatrical habits have become habitual themselves – they no longer mediate reality, they merely realise a medium’ – has created a problematic for that theatre which stands against much of what these major companies have, ideologically, come to represent, particularly in relation to the creation of a specifically Brechtian *mise-en-scène*. It is against this awareness that the Garnett/Gold decision to use exterior locations in England for *The Gangster Show* can be measured – for reference to the design of either Losey’s *Galileo* or the BBC *Caucasian Chalk Circle* will show exactly the same process of the use of a particular design, without that design actually being integrated in any way into the *mise-en-scène*, in operation in film and television practice.

It will be necessary to return to this question in my specific analysis of *The Gangster Show* – the major subject of this paper – but here it is valuable to make one final point. In his discussion of Brecht, Raymond Williams states that to look at scenes from one of his plays ‘until the right producer arrives, reminds us of how precarious the new drama is in the old theatres’. The implication that a possible resolution will come unproblematically through the location of a particular and discrete individual is a suspect and dangerous one. In British theatre it is indeed possible to locate a number of individuals, who, working from certain Brechtian theses, have developed a method of work which has come to reveal some of the inherent contradictions within the formation of British theatre practice. However, given their separate concerns with the internal reformulation of their practice, primarily through an exploration of theatrical form and an extension of reference to other models and examples, without a conclusive break across into theory and thus into politics, they have failed to realise that initial foundation in Brecht. In their search for new forms there remain contradictions with and incomplete realisations of Brechtian dramaturgy. A dramaturgy

‘whose methods were altered because it was realised that the

political effects of a certain kind of drama were inadequate and for no other reason'. Brecht continued, 'When we see now the same types of drama in other lands, we must be allowed, following a careful analysis, to expect similar results. And if our suggestions perhaps do not prove interesting at least our warning should be received with interest. We unknowingly made our mistakes. Those following us, and aware of us, make them knowingly.'

'The persecutors can only be got rid of once enough people understand the causes of their dangers and miseries, and the way things really happen. It's a question of communicating this understanding to as large a number as possible. It isn't easy however one chooses to set about it' (Brecht in *The Messingkauf Dialogues*).

The screening on BBC TV of Brecht's *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* under the title *The Gangster Show* offered a peculiarly potent possibility. The play made film is based on a genre which television audiences will readily accept. They will 'feel at home with it', for the old gangster film, which Brecht used so enthusiastically to watch, is a recurrent part of television programming. The separation from this subject comes both with the play's 'grand style' – the use of iambic pentameters – and of course in its construction out of a real historical conjuncture.

Further these two other elements, taken separately, are also characteristic subjects for television representation – BBC's 'Play of the Month' – the series of major classical theatrical texts, and the frequent documentaries which derive their subject matter from events surrounding the war and pre-war years.

Thus the possibility: a potential not fully realised, as I shall go on to argue, by the Gold film. For what now follows is an attempt to set up a series of terms which will make possible a fairly detailed analysis of the work. A part of this process will be to make reference out to other mises-en-scène for Brecht texts: my purpose being exactly to locate the work within the general notion 'Brecht in Britain', to criticise, therefore, what is characteristic in its method of operation.

1. The text, and a production history of the play within the English context

Bertolt Brecht wrote *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* in Finland in 1941. There is a note in his *Arbeitsjournal* under March 10 of that year:

'Thinking about the American theatre, a former idea came again into my head, one that I had once in New York – namely to write

84 a gangster play that certain events which we all know called to mind (the gangster play we all know). I quickly sketched out a plan for eleven or twelve scenes; naturally it must be written in the grand style.²

Just over a month later he writes of completing the 'permanent Ui suitable for performance' but comments that 'though it accounted for much of the enjoyment . . . I now feel the desire to add after it something completely and utterly unperformable anywhere: Ui Part Two, Spain/Munich/Poland/France.' Werner Hecht confirms that Brecht never followed up this plan.

Brecht's collaborator on the play was Margarete Steffin, who first worked with him on *The Horatii and the Curatii* and *The Round Heads and the Pointed Heads* in 1933/34, and subsequently on six other plays of which *Ui* and *The Good Person of Szechwan* were necessarily the last, for she died on June 4, 1942. Brecht records that her major contribution to the text was a strong insistence on the necessity of tightening up the iambic metre in which it is written.

Shortly after finishing the play, Brecht left Finland for America. It was not produced until 1958 when Palitzsch directed it in Stuttgart. On March 23, 1959 it had its Berliner Ensemble première, directed by Palitzsch and Wekwerth. Music was by Hosalla, with scenery by Von Appen. Ekkehard Schall played Arturo Ui. This production was presented by the Ensemble at the Old Vic, together with *Coriolanus* (in which Schall again played the title role), *Days of the Commune* and *The Threepenny Opera* during August 1965.

Tony Richardson, who, with George Devine in 1952/53, had had the idea of mounting a season of plays by Brecht and other authors neglected in Britain, an idea which was never fulfilled but which led instead to the founding of the English Stage Company in 1955, directed a production in New York in 1963 with Christopher Plummer as Ui. It was for this production that the Tabori adaptation, used by Gold, was prepared. As a footnote to this production it is worth recalling that Plummer, cast by the National Theatre as *Coriolanus* (in 1971) with the invitation to choose his own director, nominated Wekwerth and Tehschert, the directors of the production of the Brecht version in the 1965 Ensemble visit. He was removed from the production after, finding their direction unacceptable, he had asked for their replacement.

In 1969 the play was presented, again in the Tabori adaptation, at the Savoy, in a production transferred from the Glasgow Citizens via the Edinburgh Festival and Nottingham. As this list of transfers would suggest the production was well received and well reviewed, but nonetheless just lost money in the West End. On a nineteen-week run the total cost was £84,317 against which it took £80,929 at the box office. The director of this production was Michael Blakemore – Associate Artistic Director of the National since 1971

and responsible for their productions of (amongst others) *Long Day's Journey into Night*, *The Front Page*, and *The National Health*. As these more recent productions suggest, Blakemore makes a clear distinction between his own method of work and Brecht's: 85

'One of the great bugbears of doing Brecht at all is the legacy of Brechtian theory and the prejudices it creates. . . . Leonard Rossiter began rehearsals with the strongest antipathy to the Brechtian approach. . . . I think that any actor (or director) who allows himself to *respond instinctively* to the text will come up with Brechtian solutions, whatever his intellectual stance may be. I am no Brechtian myself, in that I would never allow his theories to override my own judgement.'

Jack Gold made his production for the BBC in 1972. He grants it a certain importance in his development from director of short films for *Tonight*, through full length documentaries, to the point where he 'moved into drama, where things were a sort of development of documentary — realistic, naturalistic with a couple of little cul-de-sacs and offshoots'. For he speaks of how 'the two big changes for me in the last year or so were *The National Health*, because I've never really done any comedy, and *Arturo Ui* — which was certainly non-naturalistic.'

His move into drama was to make *The Lump*, produced, like *Ui*, by Tony Garnett. Garnett, talking of that period in BBC Drama, insists that 'We were very firmly not doing art, right? We were just trying to make sense of the world.' Without wishing to negate the obvious but limited usefulness of such a polemic position, which led exactly to the making of *Cathy Come Home*, useful, as Colin MacCabe remarked, for its contradiction of the dominant attitude towards the homeless, and which could lead to a subversion of the distinction embodied in the notion that 'Technique (the technician) is not to get in the way of the subject matter which belongs to art (and the director),' it is, specifically in relation to the production of this Brecht text, necessary to evoke Brecht's own criteria for the criticism of this distinction.

Thus, in *On Poetry and Virtuosity*, written while preparing the Ensemble production of *Der Hofmeister* in 1950, he argues:

'For some time to come we shall need to talk about the poetry of a play and the virtuosity of its production, something that seemed of little urgency in the recent past. It seemed not merely to lack urgency but to be a positive distraction, and this less because the poetic element had been inadequately developed and appreciated than because it had been used as a pretext for maltreating reality, in that people imagined they would find poetry wherever reality was made to take a back seat. Lies masqueraded as inventiveness, imprecision as lavishness, slavery to prevailing forms as mastery of form and so on. This made it necessary to test images of reality

86 in the arts for their truth to reality. . . . As a result we were forced to speak of truth as distinct from poetry. More recently we have almost given up examining works of art for their poetic (artistic) aspect and made do with works lacking any appeal as poetry and productions from which virtuosity is absent. Such work and such productions may be effective on some level or other, but it cannot be a deep one or take a political direction. For it is a peculiarity of the means employed by the theatre that they communicate insights and impulses in the form of pleasures and that the depth of the latter corresponds to the depth of the former.'

Jack Gold has himself said that 'I think of myself as being a very functional director. I just want to get it up there as simply as possible'. Thus it will be possible to analyse some of the shortcomings of *The Gangster Show* in terms of this functionality of approach, contradicting or failing to realise fully some of the synthetic complexity of the original work.

The one moment of near virtuosity is perhaps the closing sequence of five shots and the sound track over, shots which give a weight and a concrete direction to the last lines of the Epilogue; particularly, as when the film was repeated in a BBC series of plays produced by Tony Garnett, the screening was immediately preceded by the main evening news, and followed by *Midweek*. The play, in its positive location within the larger unit, the continuum of the evening's programmes, began to fulfill its potential gestic function within the specific practice for which it was made.

2. The Adaptation used by Gold

Jack Gold has said (drawing a distinction between himself and Ken Loach): 'I'm a great believer in working from the script. If it's right I don't mess around with it. There's the script and we've agreed the lines so let's not change them unless *it's going to fit a bit easier for an actor*.' Remembering Brecht's: 'Actors are usually very self-centred about amendments . . . alterations demand a great deal of art,' it is necessary to consider briefly what is the substance of the adaptation used by Gold, its significant deviations from the original Brecht text. It is a cut version of the Tabori adaptation, but, in the interests of brevity, and without crucially misrepresenting Gold (the German text is readily available for reference), no distinction is made between Tabori's cuts/changes and Gold's.

It is still not a straightforward process, for, as Brecht never directed the play, there is, as it were, no worked version of his own. However Palitzsch and Wekwerth, in preparing the Berliner Ensemble production, made a number of alterations. One of these was the transposition of a short scene, omitted entirely from Gold's film, from the end of the play to a middle position (just before Ui takes lessons from the actor). This transposition is carried over

into the published script in the 1967 *Gesammelte Werke* (the contrast being with the *Stücke* edition), except that there it is the first half of a two-part scene immediately following the Trial scene. The second part, appearing as a discrete scene in the *Stücke*, shows Dogsborough writing his will – confessing complicity with Ui and knowledge of all that the gangsters have done. The immediately more important absent scene is also a short one. Set in Cicero (the Ensemble transferred it to ‘a street’), ‘A woman streaming with blood tumbles out of a shot-up truck’, and, calling out for help, identifies Ui as her husband’s murderer. She goes on to exclaim:

‘Whoever touches Ui is defiled!
He is the lousiest of lice, and
Everybody lets him get away with it!
You! They’re hacking us to pieces,
[*Machine gun chatters nearby. She collapses.*]
Ui and the rest!
Where are you, people? Help!
Will no-one stop the pest?’

Placed in the position originally granted to it by Brecht, the play therefore ended in a question to answer which demands the formulation of a position by the audience.

To reflect on the play’s title – *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* – is to remember the importance of showing a larger process than simply the ‘achievement’ of a single man. Brecht was well aware that this process was not complete:

‘The proletariat are missing; it was not possible to grant them a larger place, since in the particular structure any further elements would have meant too many, and would pull it away from the main problem, difficult enough to formulate in itself. (How to speak in detail of the proletariat and not of unemployment? How to talk of that and not of the systems of work, or of the parties, as well as their failure?) The one involves the other and there would come out of it a work softened by its enormity, that would lose its purpose.’

But if Ui is merely dominant, singularly possessing the centre of attention throughout, then the potential for creating the right critical distance, the valuable intervention into that peculiar process of absorption and fascination so clearly represented by Mark Eccles in introducing the Signet Edition of one of the play’s models, *Richard III* – ‘Richard is alive, he is himself alone: he is what part of ourselves would like to be, free from the censor’s conscience. He can win women, he can win power: he can enjoy using his power to destroy, to do whatever he wants to do. . . . What fun he is having’ – is more difficult to achieve.

The balance is a curiously difficult one – the attractions that the

88 piece holds as a potential grand piece of theatricality, with little necessity to find too many solutions for the particular commitment and complexity of a Brechtian mise-en-scène, can be noted from the English production history.

Here it is necessary to enumerate a number of other significant cuts and omissions made by Gold, whose absence can be posited as helping to confirm Ui's centrality, through a reduction in the portrayal of both the particular socio-economic situation and the importance of those who surround him, while a playing-up of the violence over-theatricalises the text more easily than Brecht's deliberate use of other texts as models.

1. The introduction of Dogsborough, Giri, Givola and Ui in the Prologue is cut. The connection between Ui and Richard III is therefore not made explicit as it is by Brecht.
2. Large sections of the early scenes between the members of the Cauliflower Trust are omitted. Gold introduces Ui earlier than Brecht.
3. In the play, Sheet sees a resemblance between Clark and Roma, not as in the film, Clark and Ui.
4. The journalist in the play is thrown out, not shot, and in the trial Fish is given fifteen years, not condemned to death.
5. In the play, the news of an impending investigation, brought by Butcher before Ui's arrival, causes Dogsborough to call for his camphor, not Ui's threats.
6. Brecht specifies the song to be sung thus – 'One of the body-guard comes forward and sings a schmaltzy song richly peppered with the word "Home"'. The Gangsters sit during the recital, their eyes closed, listening with rapt attention. The scant applause which follows is broken by police whistles and fire sirens'.
7. In the play Givola alone writes the false will. It is made distinctly his work rather than being a collaboration between Givola, Giri and Roma. In the same scene the conversation between Roma and Ui is much extended.
8. A large section is cut in the film from the scene in Givola's flower shop, parodying the scene in Martha's garden from Goethe's *Faust Part One*. Using one-line stichomythia (and thus also reminiscent of the Richard/Anne, Richard/Elizabeth scenes in *Richard III*), Givola/Dullfeet and Ui/Betty appear alternately as two separate couples, wandering round the shop. There is a posturing in the restrained formality which is much more telling of the social pretensions than Gold's equation – flower shop as cover for a brothel.
9. A scene is cut from the film after Dullfeet's funeral in which Roma appears to Ui in a dream, accusing him of lack of fidelity to his friends, and predicting his downfall.
10. The last scene should open with a conversation between the Chicago grocers, complaining about their subservience to Ui

and looking to the Cicero grocers to resist, who, however, defer too. As Ui enters one exclaims 89

Our only hope was this,

Someday, someone would stand up to the bastard.'

What follows is then also much extended in the play. Clark telling of the merger, Ui demanding a vote of confidence in him, and Betty explicitly supporting him, then the concluding words from Brecht's texts don't make that escalation to the world that the Tabori adaptation does:

Charleston and New York

All will be armed and no "poohee"

and no "that's just not nice"

Will delay Arturo Ui.'

What of course remains undetermined is the amount of external control put on Gold by the BBC: control over the length and/or content balance of the film. But I think two things should be noted:

1. The BBC's support of Brecht, particularly on Radio:

The Threepenny Opera Radio 1935

The Condemnation of Lucullus 1950

Mother Courage and her Children 1955 TV 1959

The Trial of Lucullus 1958

Galileo 1959 1964

The Caucasian Chalk Circle 1962 1973.

2. The propensity that British directors have shown for limiting Brecht texts by cutting them, with a consequent misplacement of their definite and deliberate structure: thus George Devine cut the Epilogue from *The Good Person of Szechwan* in his 1956 Royal Court production, Bill Gaskill cut the Hymn of Baal the Great from the beginning of *Baal* in his 1963 Phoenix Theatre production, Peter Coe cut the scenes in the context of which the story of the Caucasian Chalk Circle is performed in his 1969 Chichester production (something which has become almost standard in repertory productions). That Brecht should be done in this way, in such a theatre, is itself a reflection of Brecht's appropriation and subsequent misrepresentation.

3. The Film

'As we have seen, the playwright cuts his plays up into a series of independent playlets so that the action progresses by jumps. He doesn't like scenes to slide imperceptibly into one another. He cuts in such a way that each individual scene can be given a title of a historical or social-political or anthropological kind' (*The Messingkauf Dialogues*).

At the end of each scene of *Arturo Ui* Brecht directs that a caption appear. The parallel between the rise to power of Hitler and the scene just presented is given in the caption. Thus the definition is distinct, and the scenes themselves, rather than being the internal

90 history of Ui (that is, merely self determining), are directed by the most significant, the starkest historical moments. The play thus decentred achieves its correct parallel position with *Fear and Misery in the Third Reich* – the play which portrays a number of the personal horrors, problems, and depredations which became commonplace as the Third Reich developed in political power, in aggression and repression. But to present the play as Gold does without titles does reduce it, tending to open it out to that escalation, which is essentially a reduction. Thus a review of the Blake-more production: 'By ignoring the special features of Nazism, the play becomes a study of totalitarian terror as such.'

The necessary decentring is away from Ui, away from any notion that it is within a series of individual self-motivated concerns, stemming in their singularity from, perhaps, a particular perception, a certain recklessness or ruthlessness, that the course of the play is determined. Rather the action is controlled by the way that particular economic and historical conditions make possible the rise to power of a man living through a particularly potent set of mythic constructions, themselves the product of these conditions.

Neither is the essential action a recreation of a certain historical period, seen through an analogy, but rather it should be the received recognition by the audience of the methods that capital is required to use to sustain itself in crisis – and consequent on that, the potential escalation of the particularly overt representations of capitalist modes of operation, these shown both within the encompassing gest, the depiction of the evolution of a particular protection racket – and through direct reference to a particular historical conjuncture. 'Under different circumstances,' wrote Brecht, 'where the gangster action was solely a symbolic rendering of the other action, so close a connection between the two actions (gangster and Nazi) would be untenable – since then one would necessarily seek for the meaning of this or that aspect of a character, and would search after the prototype for each figure.'

Arturo claims his disadvantage as being 'a simple son of Brooklyn'. If 'the exhibition of classical forms' had been urged more clearly by Gold – and Brecht, in wondering about the effect of the double *Verfremdung*, does remind himself of this exhibition as a help in ensuring the 'force of operation' of the text – then the resonance with Richard III's early complaints that he cannot flatter and look fair because 'I halt and am misshapen thus' (a resonance extending of course into Ui's wooing Betty's business, not her marriage bed), could fulfil its intended function. Tabori's adaptation does not help – thus 'The bitch that bore him is in heat again' is, literally translated, 'The womb is fertile again, out of which he crept', paralleling 'From forth the kennel of thy womb hath crept a hell hound that doth hunt us all to death' from *Richard III*. Theatrical illiteracy – failure to pick up and sustain allusions and synthetic patterns – is too often symptomatic of

British production practice. It is perhaps a part of the insistence on simple coherent narrative line, the whole process kept nervously in motion: 'The pleasure of story-telling is suffocated by the fear of what is not effective.' 91

Forced economy must presumably have required Gold to shoot *The Gangster Show* on location in England (though it does carry the sense almost of a Garnett orthodoxy, since Garnett pioneered the non-studio shooting of plays for BBC Drama), thus heavily restricting the camera set-ups that he could use for most of his shooting. But three points should be made on this: First, that a continuous aspect of Brecht's practice was his insistence on the revelation of the processes by which, and the necessary limitations under which his theatre was, not conjuring, but working. Second, that in a reference in the *Arbeitsjournal*, Brecht wrote of how Ui was making cartoon use of those types of setting he had previously written for *In the Jungle of the Cities* ('where the city is the battleground') and for *Edward II* ('an artistic landscape') – another double *Verfremdung*. Third, in an interview Gold reflects that 'I just like people to be in the foreground', then, in reply to a question about his use of closeups, while speaking of his shooting style in general, explains exactly the process by which much of *Ui* was shot: 'I just like people's faces, and I don't think that that is entirely because of television . . . I'm very careful about building up scenes to get to a dramatic point with a closer shot than the previous shot, and then breaking them out and bringing them together again.'

In the version used by Gold the early confrontation scene between Ui and Dogsborough (Scene Four) contains 182 lines for which he uses eighty-seven shots. But it is framed at beginning and end by what are in essence two relatively long tracking shots – one following Dogsborough into the room when he receives Ui, lasting twenty-two lines, the other following him out into the garden to receive Clark and Butcher, thirty-three lines. Almost half of the remainder of the shots are closeups, either face only, or face and shoulders – the frequency of their use simply reflecting two major confrontations between Ui and Dogsborough. The first of these leads up to Dogsborough's denial of membership of the Trust. Following this there is a mid-shot of Ui's back as he returns to that place by the window to which he moved when he first started speaking. This is followed by a series of alternate mid-shots of Ui and Dogsborough both on dialogue and on immediate reactions to dialogue, before Ui comes in on 'YOU mean to tell me you refuse to help me as a human being'. This is on mid-shot; Ui moves into the camera which tilts upwards to hold him in closeup before he demands Dogsborough's help 'as a criminal': this climax in the argument is mirrored completely by the cutting, there then being ten cuts between closeups in seven lines, before a final shot, initially of Ui's back, becomes a midshot of Dogsborough asking for

The necessary question is whether such a mimetic style is the most productive, the most forceful way of shooting and cutting Brecht. For a potential comparison, I looked at the BBC production of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. There for the major confrontation between Simon and Gruscha in Scene Four, thirty shots are used for sixty-six lines. The sequence opens on a two-shot, then as the conversation develops, the shots tighten from full body to closeup; after breaking back out to two-shot, the conclusion of the sequence is, before the final parting two-shot, in even tighter closeups.

Allowing for the different criteria of design governing the two productions, there is a real similarity – both tend towards emphasis on narrative and on individual character. Gold, in following his own favoured shooting style, has not found a style which will answer for the multiple problems of transferring the Brechtian text out of the theatre on to film for television.

Without here positing an alternative way of shooting the sequence, it is possible to point to the requirement implicit in the scene, over and above the interpersonal conflict of Dogsborough and Ui (the reading implied by the extended use of field/reverse-field), to show not only that one man will soon need the other, but that the difference between the two men and their methods is only one of degree. Thus it can neither be contained in the simple opposition, emphasised by filming Ui from below, Dogsborough from above in the corner of a luxurious sofa, between force and achieved social position. There is a change in method through the film, so that much of the Betty/Ui conversation in the graveyard is held simply in two-shot, but nonetheless, although Gold has talked of composing the shots of the film very carefully and following Brecht's requirement that 'each little grouping of characters should be telling its own story, in relation to the hierarchy', this is not fully used for the necessary critical portrayal of the social situation, but too often more as a descriptive technique, which by retaining the individual at its centre, does not open the potential for the frame, and beyond that the montage, to create a crucial series of genuine gests, which would break or significantly disrupt the spectator's retention of the individual character's centrality. It remains too often, in Barthes' words, 'bogged down in "reality", in "humanity"'. The film stands somewhere between a conventional structuring that has a development and a maturation and the correct epic form where 'all the burden of meaning bears on each scene'.

Where gests begin to be developed, and it is possible to see a concentration on hands and handshakes – 'they slap my hand when ere I stretch it out' – as one location of this, leading to the long held moment at the end of the Ui/Betty scene, the proffered hand in leather glove which Betty regards for about eleven seconds before looking up at Ui, then the temporal dislocation (which this is, in

the specific film's particular use of time), hence the break away from the implicitly defined 'real'; does begin to reveal the possibilities that are too often submerged under a generalised ethic of restraint. However the effectiveness of even this moment is subverted by the insistent emphasis on the maintenance of a near-continuous narrative line; thus the next shots, Ui and Betty's looks at each other at the beginning of the last scene, are built out of the positionings within that previous frame.

To conclude I would like briefly to consider the performance of Nicol Williamson, as Arturo Ui. From the beginning there is a self-possession, a sense of instinctive control in the performance, which the use of music strengthens, heightening as it does the emotional impact of the early appearances. (Parenthetically it should be noted how this music is at moments integrated into the diegesis: thus its presence is controlled by the door into the back room of Givola's flower shop.) Again there are dislocations, moments when Ui is shown to be stupidly inadequate, but they are too random sufficiently to subvert the internal requirement to achieve an authority that compels. These minimal disruptions fail to establish the right separation from Ui as gangster. It is not his ideology and concomitantly his methods of operation that are exposed by humour, but rather his momentarily revealed inadequacy (for example, the moment he walks into the closed car door) both gives him a certain appeal – 'like me, this man quite often can't cope' – and more importantly, by evoking the genre of the gangster film, offers Ui as inefficient gangster, rather than as gangster, to ridicule: the laughter is unproblematic because it can operate from a position of superiority rather than calling into question that position. This criticism can be extended to the particular function given to O'Casey – his knowing smiles into camera deny the trial scene its serious content which necessarily rest in the court's ready acceptance of, its operation in accordance with, the speeches and the actions of Giri and Givola.

Discussion

R: Can I ask you to clarify your point about the inadequacy of the translation of the end of the text?

Pete Mathers: What I said was that if you look at the German there is a specific reference to a line from *Richard III* which is lost in Tabori's translation. In making the adaptation, he avoided the parallel with *Richard III* and also missed out the pastiche of the Martha's garden scene from *Faust* in Givola's flower shop. These

94 were things missing from the Tabori adaptation rather than cuts by Gold. They are purely textual points, but they're emblematic of how, rather than using the complexity of the text's literary models, Tabori had just taken a single line through it.

Ben Brewster: He seems to have distributed the Shakespeareanisms on the surface of the text, as mannerisms. There are hundreds of easily picked-up Shakespearean tags, so it becomes no more than an irony, these gangsters speaking Shakespearean language. The more profound meanings behind them are almost totally lost, except where they're built very deeply into the structure of the play as in the Ui-Betty scene in the graveyard, where obviously nobody could remove the reference to the Richard-Ann courtship without losing the story.

PM: The Richardson production of *St Joan of the Stockyards* in 1964 failed to realise that the play is parodying a variety of classical forms of drama; it took it all very straight. The theatre in this country is still illiterate, by which I mean it fails to see the potential for taking other styles of performance and parodying them in the way that Brecht does it, a way that gives meaning. The serious possibilities of parody are never made use of. Thus Gold doesn't seem to play on the idea we have of Richard III except where it's unavoidable, and even then he could have made more of it, for example by setting the courtship scene over Dull-foot's coffin, which would have created a visual reference to standard productions of *Richard III* to strengthen the verbal one.

S: Hasn't Gold replaced a theatrical literacy with a cinematic one? The end was staged and even shot a bit like Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*. The two henchmen introduce Ui almost in the same words that Göring uses before Hitler appears and the way they move into the auditorium as a threesome and the position of the camera looking up at Hitler are all surely a deliberate evocation of *Triumph of the Will*. Bits were shot with reference to gangster movies, too, and the iconography and the lighting of film noir. There was some awareness of film at least.

PM: I wasn't trying to say it's totally bad. But in relationship to the specific problems of creating a mise-en-scène, I think it does fail at any but the most obvious level. When one gets down to the way a particular scene, a particular conflict between the characters is shot, Gold slips into the style of naturalistic dialogue; his constant use of field/reverse-field doesn't suggest he's making any real effort. As Blakemore described it, one reads the text intuitively, one has an intuitive response to it, and that is sufficient. The text is so powerful one is bound to get something out of it, but Gold explores its potential so little.

BB: Where cinematic elements do come in, it's almost always the case that they're already in the text, explicitly or at least very obviously. For example, the ellipses in the trial scene represented by wipes reproduce the play's dividing of that scene into fragments

separated by blackouts, which is presumably a cinematic reference by Brecht himself in the text. The killing of Roma has such a clear reference to the St Valentine's Day massacre that you'd have to be blind not to film it in a film noir style. 95

BB: How did it fit into the structure of BBC drama? The Messina *Caucasian Chalk Circle* production, for example, with its very obvious theatricality and very clear 'art' connotations was very simply assimilable into the conventions of TV drama. Would the *Gangster Show* be more disconcerting for an audience?

PM: I think it does have a terrific potential to disconcert and disrupt people's expectations of what is produced on television, through its use of those three methods that are singly conventional parts of BBC programming but in a combination could be utterly disruptive if fully revealed. In Gold's production the revelation isn't complete, so the potential is not fulfilled.

T: It would have fitted very snugly into BBC Play of the Month traditions in that it was really a sort of black comedy. The horror of 'What can we do about Arturo Ui?' is collapsed into one black comic shrug: 'We can't do anything.' There is an identification with the lawyer who is so smart and trusting, with the emphasis on trusting. It's perfect for the BBC and the Brechtian comedy doesn't work at all.

BB: It's remarkable that that role is given to such a prominent actor, Sam Wanamaker, and that in the play the two lawyers are different, O'Casey at the inquiry and a quite different one for Fish's trial. The result is that the figure of the defeated liberal gets enormous prominence in the production.

V: For England it's not important to do good productions of Brecht plays, it would be more interesting and more political to do good Brechtian work on, let's say, Noel Coward in the West End. In Germany the most important Brechtian lessons are done on the traditional repertoire, not so much on Brecht himself, even at the Berliner Ensemble in East Berlin, because of its blocked attitude to Brecht. It would be better here, too, to displace the lessons and rethink local traditions.

PM: I absolutely agree with you. But I think it is useful to look at the way we're even incapable in British theatre of creating a valid *mise-en-scène* for Brecht. There is a series of directors and playwrights, Joan Littlewood, Arden and others, who have worked mainly on texts other than Brecht. Although they started with certain Brechtian theses their search has been an entirely internal one. Brook is a characteristic example. He only looks at other theatre forms and other ways of doing theatre, rather than actively trying to create a theatre which takes a political direction; the whole search is totally within theatrical form, rather than there being an alignment with a political position. There are very few

96 people in this country who begin to make such an alignment. Bill Gaskill's production of Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer* has learnt from Brecht's adaptation of the play, but if you look at the way Gaskill has directed Brecht himself, you can't fail to be unhappy about his understanding of Brecht. One thus has an external as well as an internal criticism of that production if it claims to be a Brechtian one.

James Pettifer: What you would have to come to terms with in the English classical tradition would be Shakespeare, because in most of the recent Terry Hands productions with the Royal Shakespeare Company, the devices have become absolutely institutionalised, precisely as technical devices. If this were seriously to be attempted by somebody it would be a huge task. You couldn't just do it in terms of a lightweight like Coward, to have any lasting influence you would have to take on the central classical tradition in England, that of Shakespeare, which given the general understanding of Brecht would be very difficult.

BB: Could we extend the discussion and talk about television not only from the point of view of TV presentations of Brecht and Brechtian TV presentations of English classics, but also from the point of view of what a Brechtian intervention in television as a whole might be? One of the striking things about television is that at a very formal level it seems extraordinarily 'Brechtian' all the time: it's constantly interrupted, particularly in the commercial channels where there are a whole series of conventions for handling the advertising breaks which then structure the play and can be seen in almost any American drama series. There are conventions which have been developed in relation to the serial, which imposes 'epic' forms simply because it appears at weekly intervals: it cannot maintain the unity of time which is one of the essences of non-epic or empathetic theatre. Does this 'Brechtianism' of TV raise problems for what a Brechtian television would be, ie would the latter try in some sense to convert these devices, to exploit them, using them in the same way Brechtian devices are used in Brechtian plays, to construct social gestures, or would it have to break with these 'Brechtianisms' and have a completely new conception of the device which could genuinely be described as Brechtian television?

P: In the series, Ben, don't you think that the Brechtianism is negated by a cumulative identification? that although there are ruptures within specific episodes, there is a continuity over a long period of time which in practice breaks down any kind of alienation effect?

Paul Willemsen: The interruption represented by commercials in a television film or drama does sometimes create a certain type of Brechtian effect, but it's purely by accident, for instance, if at the end of a highly dramatic scene in a television film a woman makes

a speech against domestic slavery, say, and that is immediately followed by 'You must buy this beautiful new cooker'. This can occasionally produce certain shocks, but not as a rule, because the commercials is the point where you are not supposed to watch any more, where you get up to make coffee. It's an entirely different mode of reading. In a reading which is genuinely epically interrupted, one really continues to read, reading, precisely, the interruption; but at a commercial break one simply switches off reading. Alan Lovell: Those shocks may be only mistakes, but it's precisely those kinds of things that socialist criticism should be very attentive to, the kind of mistakes that can be used. They occur very infrequently, but they may lead to ways of operating in the media.

W: It is a very interesting point that as we look at television as a whole we see that it is very epic. It's not Brechtian, it's not political; it's not epic in the political sense, but it uses all the Brechtian devices – titles, repetition, talking to the audience, a mixture of narrative and documentary, and so on. But television is too 'digested', as Barthes says of cinema, and it's even more applicable to television. People could not be critical, it's all one big continuous narrative. Disruptions are so constant in television that the audience doesn't recognise them, even disruptions Brecht would have regarded as very interesting. When *The Pallisers* was shown on Belgian TV one episode was missed out, and nobody noticed, whereas Brecht would have said that leaving one act out of a classical play was very important.

PW: At the end of his life Brecht did say that he foresaw a time when epic theatre would become the dominant classical tradition and therefore to remain revolutionary would have to give way to dialectical theatre. The set of formulae that has become known as epic theatre – distanciation, literarisation, separation, and so on – would have to be abandoned. Dialectical theatre he defines strictly in terms of its political intervention, and whatever means are necessary to make the political intervention will be a part of dialectical theatre, rather than a fixed set of formulae. I think he foresaw the popular commercial forms of entertainment, the media, taking up a lot of the methods he produced in the 1930's and which were then revolutionary.

W: That is why we should be more careful with terms such as disruptive, literarisation, montage and so on. They only have value when they are put to work politically.

X: Both in terms of theatre and television, one tends to regard a Brecht production either as a piece with some polemical point or else as a rich play, full of associations and large characters which people like Nicol Williamson can play. It doesn't seem to me that within any structure capable of meeting a large audience anyone has managed to bring the two together. Some recent provincial pro-

98 ductions of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* have focussed on the problem of how far Brecht is a political playwright and how far he is a great writer by playing with the prologue, rewriting it, adjusting it to contemporary situations. I saw one with a building site for the prologue and a discussion of the worker's role in the trade unions, and another about the attitude towards squatting and the private ownership of land. Do you think that one should get away from a sense of the sacrosanct Brecht text in order to reactivate the larger plays for a British audience at this point in time?

PM: In *The Messingkauf Dialogues*, Brecht does say that the performance is what all the effort should be directed at, not the play. Alterations demand a great deal of art, that's all. Planchon says that he came to Brecht without knowing anything about him and did his first two Brecht productions with a remarkable fidelity to Brecht. Having done that, he felt he had achieved an understanding of the way that Brecht operated, and on a subsequent Brecht production he made a series of alterations to the text, and his writing since then seems very much to have grown out of a desire to use Brecht to handle other situations. I don't think anyone in this country has yet absorbed Brecht to this extent, because they've come to him rather as Gaskill has, with the Royal Court attitude that the director can dominate the text, so they make a lot of cuts during rehearsal but never consider the theoretical problems of creating specific productions for different specific circumstances. I agree with you that it is a possibility, but one that hasn't been explored in this country, partly because Brecht arrived as the technical elements of alienation rather than through any serious reading of his plays, let alone his theoretical writings, almost none of which were available in English until Willet's book came out in the 1960's. Before that everyone had seen the Ensemble, and they related to it entirely from what they could see.

X: I want to push that further: it seems to me that to get an effective Brechtian theatre you've got to get away from Brecht the personality, the writer. Gaskill is a perfect example. He did a model-book production of *Mother Courage* which was very boring, it had no motivation and no audience, it was just a classic production of a classic play. Now he's left the Royal Court and is working with a more collaborative group, Joint Stock, and their play *Fan-Shen* strikes me as an extremely Brechtian piece of work. It's obviously Brechtian stylistically, but that's only incidental; more important, a Brechtian learning process takes place in front of you, which goes on and on and on, never giving you an achieved point of rest. It is extremely effective. I think it may be that Brecht has become a classic like Shakespeare too quickly, and Brecht the classic needs to be forgotten.

PM: I agree. There has been very much a process of appropriation: by now Brecht is regarded by programmers as one of the series of

great playwrights that one can put on and get an audience for.

AL: Isn't this a point where you haven't taken Joan Littlewood seriously enough? After all, as you pointed out, she has had a remarkably longstanding interest in Brecht. But her work is based on the destruction of any sense of a finished text, so the playwright isn't the dominant person in the process, but genuinely a collaborator, someone who provides maybe starting-points or middle-points. The text and the whole conception of an author and a text presented are destroyed. Thus she reacted strongly against Brecht in that sense.

PM: At one time she seemed to find herself very much in a position where it was also the individual creativity of the actor that she sought to encourage. I think that is another example of working entirely within the confines of theatrical forms and traditions. She just took the notion of improvisation to an extreme. One of her instructions to actors was that it is one of their last priorities to learn their lines, it comes after getting a feeling of the character, their own expression in relation to that character. This seems to me a long way from Brecht, whose position was that there should be much more of a two-way process between the written word and the actor's possible contributions: those contributions may make the play more effective, but that effectiveness derives from a political standpoint rather than from a notion of personal fulfilment.

AL: But surely it's very important to try to create as it were a socialist form of theatre, where, instead of the actors being what they seem to me to be in Brecht, ie secondary to a text though they may bring something to it, a position found in another form in the British theatre where actors and actresses are expected to be stupid because all they have to do is mouth a text given to them, the dominance of the text is broken and the actors are brought into a genuinely collaborative process in which they are just as important as the playwright. That would seem to me quite a radicalising effect.

PM: You seem to be saying that it is only if you get a series of individuals fulfilling themselves on stage that you will have a socialist theatre, that that theatre is the theatre of self-expression and fulfilment. I don't see anything socialist about that.

BB: For Brecht the text is part of the action. That's why there's all that emphasis on the iambics in *Ui* – the style of delivery is a gesture among the other gestures that make up the action. When he was working with the Berliner Ensemble and able to work on something other than a piece of paper, he attempted to construct a set of ways of documenting other aspects of the action than the spoken action. He would never have accepted the idea of the actor as the source of expression in a situation set for him by the play, which is what always emerges from the notion of spontaneous theatre: the author or the collaborative group provide an action and then what's spoken is supposed to emerge spontaneously from

100 the positions defined by the action. In *The Flight of the Lindberghs*, for example, the radio audience were to be given a prepared text to recite. It would be no more really spontaneous if they were told 'invent your own words, but we're going to set up the situation on the radio in which you're going to say those words'. Improvisation seems to make the words a reflection of the action rather than part of it as they are for Brecht.

AL: I think you've both made the notion quite crude. Joan Littlewood certainly moves in that direction at times, but it's quite wrong to identify all her works with the notion of actors simply fulfilling themselves. The point is to make them more central to the actual construction of the theatrical event as a whole, text, performance and so on, rather than there being one author and a dominant text. That seems to me different from people happily fulfilling themselves in a spontaneous and jolly way.

P: One of the troubles with *The Gangster Show* was that the author of the event there was very much Nicol Williamson. The whole production was just support for his performance. So actors can be authors within specific performances, depending on the relationship they establish with the director. The type of performance depends on the type of relationship. Precisely one of the difficulties of taking Brecht into the British theatre is that because he was working in a very close relationship to an ensemble in Germany, there are spaces in his texts, spaces which can be misappropriated by British directors.

PW: Alan, you seem to be arguing precisely that the actor becomes in his own right, precisely as happens in the classical forms of theatre that Brecht set out to destroy, the autonomous individual expressing his feelings. For Brecht he has to function within a model in which he is only one part, one function, one element. Brecht himself is not the author of this machine, because some of the elements were produced by other people, eg Shakespeare.

BB: We're now talking about collective work again, as we did in earlier sessions. As was argued then, collective work is not a matter of a group making democratic decisions, but of a political agreement between them.

AL: You have to relate the issue to the question already raised today about the appropriation of Brecht into a theatre of texts and performances such as Nicol Williamson seems to stand for. It would seem to me that one way of intervening at the moment in the theatre so as to destroy that appropriation-as-classic would be to break with the notion that the text is dominant. That's a different thing from personal expression.

Brecht in Britain: The Independent Political Film
(on *The Nightcleaners*)

Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen

I

To begin with this paper is concerned with situating *The Nightcleaners* in relation to political film-making in this country and in examining the kinds of issues it raises, because one can only really assess the unique contribution *The Nightcleaners* is making towards the development of political cinema in this context. At the beginning of the Brecht Event James Pettifer in his paper posed the central problem for political film making when he pointed to the important formal differences between two proletarian films made under the sponsorship of the German Communist Party – Mutter Krause and Brecht and Dudow's *Kuhle Wampe* – demonstrating precisely in what ways Brecht and Dudow differed in their treatment of the notion of class struggle and class consciousness. While Mutter Krause simply shows that a political force for change exists, Brecht and Dudow attempt to show the methods by which class consciousness itself is changed to achieve the end of the class struggle. In our discussions about Lindsay Anderson yesterday it became very clear that what was at stake was in fact what do we understand by working-class consciousness in terms of the British cinema. Alan Lovell pointed to a certain notion of working-class culture, hypostasised from social reality, unchanging and untouchable, having been an important element in British popular cinema over the past two decades and not to be discounted. Such a view of working-class consciousness is extremely problematic as is the vague 'socialist tradition' so often invoked along with it; both notions should be scrutinised. The whole critique of working-class culture generated by writers like Hoggart, E P Thompson and Williams (although he has transcended the limitations of such a position in recent years) presents it as an organic entity, a monolithic 'positivity', a view which lacks any real sense of contradiction and struggle within working-class consciousness. It is this hermetically closed culture, this corporate class consciousness which has served as a major obstacle to the development of Marxist theory within the Labour Movement and checked the emer-

102 gence of a hegemonic socialism. In the ideology of Labourism we see not only the authentic heritage of working-class radicalism, but the deadly legacy of utilitarianism, Fabianism and Methodism. The lack of any real critique of these ideological determinations on working-class culture has been wide-ranging in its effects; in terms of British cinema they have led to a kind of utopian idealism on the part not only of film-makers working within the system, like Anderson, but also of those outside it in the political cinema. Too often the problem is posed simply in terms of film as a commodity, and control of the means of production and distribution (the position expressed by Alan Lovell yesterday) and the whole question of film as an ideological product is overlooked. As far as collective political film-making is concerned, since 1968 the practice of political cinema has undergone radical changes; along with the politicisation of younger film-makers has gone a highly eclectic aesthetic development. It is worth looking in detail at some of the assumptions behind such developments because only in this context is the unique contribution of *The Nightcleaners* revealed.

In general terms developments have been intimately linked to a profound ideological reaction to the Hollywood system and to the ownership and control of the television industry, involving a re-discovery of notions of 'human nature', 'freedom' and 'self-expression'. This ideological tendency is, I believe, profoundly misleading and has been a major hindrance to the development of the alternative cinema in general. It has led to the adoption of an essentially defensive stance in relation to the whole question of the constitution of the media past and present and even to its own revolutionary potential. This defensive stance has served to mask many of the problems which revolutionary cinema must face, such as the very fact that mere ideological formulae cannot but produce false solutions to political problems. In 'Constituents of a Theory of Media' (*New Left Review* n 64, November-December 1970), Enzensberger describes this position as resting on the thesis of manipulation – the idea that the media comprise a concrete entity consciously performing a repressive function in society. This renders possible an idealistic belief that there can be such a thing as pure, unmanipulated 'truth' and the posing of a simple solution, ideological in nature, that control of the means of production must of itself serve as some guarantee of revolutionary content. The foremost limitation of the manipulation thesis is that it lacks any adequate theory of what ideology is and how it functions in the film text – how the media as one of the ideological apparatuses of the state inculcate and transmit ideology. Ideology is not a question of conscious ideas circulating in people's heads, but is essentially unconscious in nature, consisting of a system of representations (images, myths, ideas or conceptions about the world) – a structure in which we think and act. In this sense it is inscribed into the very material practices of the cinema; it consists of the

totality of the system which makes up the film text. To make a film is to submit oneself to the rules and meanings generated by classic Hollywood cinema and by television documentary, for it is these dominant cultural modes which have set the standards of visual literacy and readability for us. Thus, in this sense, to work outside the system is still to work in all important respects within its reflection; all artistic production is a struggle within ideology. In his essay on the classic realist text (*Screen* v 15 n 2, Summer 1974), Colin MacCabe described one of the fundamentally reactionary practices of the classic realist cinema as precisely the petrification of the spectator in a position of pseudo-dominance offered by the metalanguage – a higher degree of abstraction which speaks the truth of the other discourses in the film text. This metalanguage, resolving as it does all contradiction, places the spectator outside the realm of struggle, ultimately outside the realm of meaningful action altogether. The metalanguage offers to the spectator a point of view which is both self-evident and unproblematic and is presented as a sufficient basis for struggle. The dominance of the metalanguage not only characterises most classic realist film texts made within the system, but most of those made outside it.

In Britain collective film-making practice, despite its achievements (which have been considerable), has been particularly affected not only by the manipulation thesis and the assumptions of the classic realist text, but also by wider political misconceptions about the nature of working-class culture. A persistent limitation has been, on the one hand, a militant economism which sees the control of the means of production as a sufficient guarantee of revolutionary content, and an ultra-leftist idealism which poses the notion of working-class consciousness as the sole basis for struggle. Political cinema has been seen primarily in agit-prop terms – the instrumental means by which the ‘voice of the people’ can be heard. Ideology is seen as a monolith propagated by the bourgeoisie through the media to manipulate and deceive the masses, who are a monolith too. For instance *Cinema Action* has concentrated on documenting workers’ struggles (UCS, the dockers etc) from an essentially workerist perspective; *Liberation Films*, a community-based group, on the other hand, has concentrated on more populist, grass-roots struggles within local communities, taking up a liberal/social-democratic stance, while the newly-formed *Newsreel Collective* are developing an ultra-leftist variant of this position. What characterises all these films is their dependence on *cinéma-vérité* forms which purport to capture the world as it ‘really is’. The effect of such a form of realism is to convey the impression of a homogeneous world – a false sense of continuity and coherence reinforced by identification: the impression that truth can indeed be manifest out there in the visible world. It embodies a belief in what Christian Metz has called ‘the innocence of the image, which is somehow mysteriously exempt from connotation’. This unprob-

104 lematic, immediate transparency of the image (discussed by Stephen Heath in relation to the photograph), legitimised by synchronous speech, constitutes a behaviourist strategy aimed at producing the impression that individuals and groups participate in some mythical unity of consciousness. Such a simple reproduction of reality tells us nothing about that reality – the real forces in operation – and yet it produces in the spectator the effect of reality, a reality from which contradiction and struggle have been eliminated.

The best films of this kind – for instance *The Miners' Film* made by *Cinema Action* which is being shown at the festival and the London Women's Film Group's *Women of the Rhondda* – while working within the assumptions of the classic realist text and subscribing to a mythical unity of consciousness, do succeed in a real sense in exploring the strengths of 'proletarian positivity' and provide at least some basis for struggle in that they help provide an understanding of the past and set up one central contradiction: between the dominant discourse of the time and that of the film text itself. In this way they are progressive in a limited, short-term sense. At worst, augmented by commentary and glib slogans, films of this kind can deny the reality of contradiction altogether (eg the *Newsreel Collective's* film on abortion) and simply present a view to be consumed by the viewer. *The Nightcleaners* is a film which radically challenges the assumptions behind this practice of cinema and is undoubtedly the most important political film to have been made in this country.

Before proceeding to a detailed analysis of the film it is worth saying a few words about its relation to the whole question of feminism. Feminism and how one analyses patriarchy have posed a persistent problem for the vulgar Marxist notion of ideology, and it is significant that it has been in films such as *The Nightcleaners* and *The Amazing Equal Pay Show* made by the London Women's Film Group which have had to confront the contradiction between sexism and class struggle that the limitations of the vulgar Marxist position have been transcended from an absolute necessity, as it were. For Marxist-Feminists the nightcleaners' campaign raised fundamental issues of both a theoretical and practical nature, some of which *The Nightcleaners* examines in detail; most importantly, the relationship between sexual oppression and class exploitation. In addition, the predominantly middle-class composition of the Women's Liberation Movement and the 'socialist tradition', especially the trade-union movement. The feminist intervention re-defines what we mean by class struggle, and in this respect, *The Nightcleaners* offers an important contribution.

II

Our descriptive analysis is divided into two parts, corresponding

A. First level of dialecticisation

The first image of the film presents us with an extremely grainy closeup of a woman's face, with the titles diagonally traversing the frame. The image itself has a jerky, stop-motion movement. This opening shot draws attention to the codes associated with mechanical reproduction and iconicity, ie to the transforming/productive role of camera and processing techniques at play in the cinematic construction of a film text. One of the basic materials for the construction of a film being precisely iconic images, this opening in effect foregrounds the fact that these images are in no way 'natural' or 'real', but the product of a work of constructive transformation. Moreover, the graininess, the nature of the close up and the jerky motion all emphasise that the 'recorded' image itself has been worked on: the shot does not 'scan the face of a woman', it scans the image of the face of a woman, resulting in a new, different image, setting up a tension between the image obtained through the process of mechanical reproduction (first transformation) and that same image re-worked (second transformation), to some extent broken down back into its component elements. In short, the opening shot proposes two elements: the image together with the process of image construction.

This shot is followed by a shot of a clapper board and a woman talking on the telephone, immediately followed by a re-take of that shot. This arrangement, emphasising discontinuity and repetition, introduces another crucial aspect of text construction: editing. Instead of being drawn into the film by means of 'invisible' editing or by a logical succession of shots, the discontinuity and repetition focus attention on the very fact that the sequential arrangement of images is neither accidental nor self-evident, but a strategy involving exclusions and selections.

These same two shots also introduce the notion of the construction of the sound track, partly by referring to the function of a clapper board (synchronisation of sound and image) and partly by the sudden violent eruption of sound into the silence of the opening. In this instance, the reader is prevented from considering the sound as somehow naturally emanating from the image and the construction of the sound track itself is underlined instead. These shots also introduce still another element into the text: they foreground the relation between the image and the pro-filmic event, ie between the act of filming and that which is filmed.

It would appear therefore that the first few shots of the film provide a concise but complex (de)construction of the very process of film-making.

At this point, a second set of images emerges, relating to the work performed by the nightcleaners and the conditions under

106 which that work is carried out. The analytical-descriptive presentation of this work interacts with the presentation of the cinematic work necessary for the construction of a film text, the co-presence of these two work processes resulting in a mutual transformation: whereas the cinematic process was dominant initially and drew attention to itself only, the meanings produced by the foregrounding of these codes and processes alter when seen in context of the work performed by the cleaners – for example, the discontinuities and repetitions acquire a different connotation when applied to the gestures of the women; but the meanings produced by the images of women at work also change, because they are caught up in a process of cinematic construction/re-presentation – for example, certain aspects of their work, attitudes, etc are rearranged to bring out their most salient and relevant features. This dual process of transformation constitutes the first level of dialecticisation of the film.

Into these sets of images, a new device intervenes: sections of black spacing break up the flow of images. Initially, from a cinematic point of view, the black spacing re-focusses our attention on the editing work, but the alternation between image/black spacing/image, etc also serves as an analogy for the composition of the image band itself, for this consists of a series of separate images. The 'blind spots' between them, normally invisible because both camera and projector are designed to create the illusion of a continuous flow of images, are re-introduced by the marked interruption of groups of images. However, the device has more important functions than this. In the more usual forms of cinema, the filmed world (the diegesis) is presented to us as a coherent, homogeneous whole, precisely because of the apparently uncoded transparent form of text construction relying heavily on the powers of analogical representation. Every corner of the frame is 'filled up'. There are no gaps or absences in it. This illusion of homogeneity banishes contradiction from the frame, as the frame precisely forms the boundary of a plenitude which is the image. The insertion of black spacing destroys this imaginary plenitude, recreating gaps in the text and shattering the diegetic homogeneity, thus re-introducing contradiction into the frame. Yet another connotation of this particular device is the impression it produces of 'obliterated, absent images', perhaps even impossible images, in the sense that there are important aspects of any social process which cannot be filmed. Images never present the reality of a situation, only its phenomenal surface, and even that only in a fragmentary form. In this film, not only is the illusion of a diegetic homogeneity dispelled, but also the idea that reality itself is available in the form of a homogeneous surface waiting to be filmed. Finally, perhaps the most significant aspect of the black spacing is that it allows the reader time and together provides the reader with an incentive to think. Indeed, it seems inevitable that when

a reader is suddenly confronted with such inserts, this should produce the questions Why? and Why here? These are in fact the questions the reader must ask and attempt to answer in order to construct the coherence of the film for him or herself. It is therefore also imperative that the black-spacing device be repeated regularly throughout the film, because, as it progresses, there is the ever present threat or temptation to become immersed in/submerged by the flow of images. This repeated breaking of the flow is one of the most essential aspects of political film-making (allowing the reader to construct a critical reading of the text as it unfolds, and not to sweep him or her along on a stream of emotionality). However, although very effective, the insertion of black spacing is by no means the only possible way of achieving this, as is demonstrated by Straub/Huillet's insertion of the car journeys through Rome in *History Lessons*.

To sum up this first part of the analysis: the initial images of the film present (a) the fact of cinematic construction (a layer of recurring devices which will run throughout the entire text) and (b) the outline of the socio-political situation of the nightcleaners, ie the basis of the struggle. Moreover, the relation between (a) and (b) is also brought to our attention, that is, precisely, the problem of the 'representation of a struggle' in cinematic terms.

B. Second level of dialecticisation

This level depicts the social forces at work in the struggle, and their development during the period covered by the film. It proceeds by orchestrating a series of discourses in struggle: the real object of the film becomes the charting of the shifting relations between these discourses, each representing a political/ideological position within the social formation and caught up within its dynamic. In this context the term 'discourse' is being somewhat loosely used to refer to series of signifiers, distributed across various materials of expression which, taken together, outline the space of a particular position outside the discourse. It is the struggle between these positions, the shifting pattern of antagonisms, oppositions and alliances which form the object of the film at this level.

1. The discourse of the nightcleaners.

As the film progresses, the mode of inscription of this discourse changes from the spoken enunciation of their initial situation, predominantly presented in the form of sync-sound interviews providing the reader with information, towards images of women listening, their comments on the developments within and issues raised by the struggle being presented in voice-off. The change from immediate expression to learning, listening and drawing conclusions is underlined by means of a change in the mode of inscription, a strategy which introduces the first of the three learn-

108 ing processes which structure the text: the learning process experienced by the women in struggle.

One particular aspect of this discourse, the importance of which cannot be stressed enough, decisively distinguishes this film from more conventional political films. It avoids the trap of presenting the working class as an ideologically homogeneous bloc and focusses on its internal contradictions as well: eg the woman who continues to do night work even though it is likely to kill her, not because she cannot afford daycare facilities but because she doesn't trust anybody else with her children (the ideology of the family at work with tragic results).

2. The discourse of women's liberation.

This discourse undergoes a linear development, from a position totally divorced from the struggle to a position where it assumes the role of the union (with all the contradictions and problems that such a position entails for a movement which is not – as yet – really geared to fulfil such a function). From isolated voice-off, this discourse gradually draws nearer to the focus of the struggle until finally, after a period of practical involvement, it emerges as the main organisational force. The most important point about this discourse is that it too presents a learning process, developing alongside that of the nightcleaners, converging with it and changing as a function of it.

The first intervention in this series is the voice-over towards the beginning of the film, discussing women's conditioning. However, this statement appears to lack any real connection with the images at that particular point, and intervenes as an intrusion. The second instance of that discourse, discussing women's sexuality, again appears divorced from the reality of the struggle. However, it is immediately followed by images which do establish links: the point about the sexual exploitation of women for the purposes of capitalism is echoed in an image of a nightcleaner, framed in a lit window, forming a frame within a frame and evoking, amongst other things, the aesthetic inscription of the 'image' of woman as spectacle. Moreover, this image is followed by a sequence in which two women talk about the destructive results their exhausting working conditions have had on their emotional as well as their sex lives. In this way, the links between the two discourses are suggested, although still in a roundabout way. The next intervention presents the leafleting activities of the women's movement, which is one step closer to the reality of the struggle, although still largely ineffective (as the women point out themselves). Gradually, the representatives of the women's movement become more closely identified with the struggle, a shift in their position underscored by the fact that their discourse is now presented in the form of images with sync-sound, discussing strategy and practical organisation, culminating in their assumption of the duties

of a trade union, supporting to the best of their ability a full-time officer (May Hobbs). 109

3. The discourse of the film-makers.

By this we do not mean the discourse of the film-makers as 'authors', but only those interventions which are directly denoted in the film itself. Initially, the film-makers are present as voice-off, asking basic questions about wages and conditions, ie as passive recipients of information. As the film progresses, they appear as more and more involved with the struggle until towards the end of the film they are discussing theoretical issues and aspects of socialism with the nightcleaners.

4. The discourse of the employer.

This discourse is carried by a small number of people and changes in the space of the film only from a straightforward authoritarian position to a social-democratic, manipulative one. This change appears to occur under the pressure of the struggle (threat of unionisation) and in the context of the requirements of capitalist competition between small employers and big ones: a 'good' and 'responsible' union may help an employer to eliminate his weaker competitors. It is also interesting to note that there are a series of signifiers distributed across the film denoting the absence or elusiveness of the representatives of the employers (petty officials). The radical separation between employer and worker is not only underlined by 'absent' mediators, but also by the fact that the 'discourse' of the employer has to be brought to the cleaners in the form of a tape recording!

5. The discourse of the spokeswoman of the nightcleaners.

As the struggle develops, the discourse of the nightcleaners splits into two: that of the cleaners themselves and that of their spokeswoman (May Hobbs). She functions as the direct antagonist to the discourse of the employer. Her discourse evolves from a total immersion in a mass struggle (her speech at the Trafalgar Square meeting) towards total isolation from that struggle, as a result of organisational difficulties and a series of other pressures. Towards the end of the film, she is seen sitting alone in the frame, biting her nails, against a blank background. In order to understand how this has come about, it is necessary to chart the progress of the discourse of May Hobbs in relation to that of the unions, that of women's liberation, that of the nightcleaners and of the publicity media.

6. The discourse of the unions.

This discourse is inscribed in two forms: one verbal (union representatives talking), the other processional (demonstrations and marches). As far as the nightcleaners' struggle is concerned, both activities appear unhelpful, to say the least. The union is also the main carrier of the discourse of sexism (see below): eg the union

110 man paternalistically wagging his finger while laying down the law to a group of women; the two workers dancing together, connoting an explicit exclusion of women from their activities. The issues put forward in this discourse acutely pose the problem of the limitations of Labourism and its relation to the real interests of the working class: eg the women saying they vote Labour because 'it is the only Party for the working class'. Whether because of their organisational inertia or because of a strategic unwillingness to support the nightcleaners at that time, the result of the unions' lack of effective support is to create a vacuum filled by the representatives of the women's movement. But as that movement is not really geared for such a function, the cleaners' spokeswoman, May Hobbs, comes to lack a secure base, and in the end finds herself isolated largely because of the nature and the configuration of the discourses surrounding her.

7. There are also isolated interventions by various political figures and other observers such as the bourgeois media. The main function of these interventions, apart from placing the struggle in a wider political context, is to provide one more essential piece of information regarding May Hobbs' situation at the end of the film. The main point about the publicity media is made by the women's movement: the danger that certain aspects of the struggle will be incorporated into the capitalist spectacle: the film shows May Hobbs getting caught up in this process of incorporation, a factor which substantially contributes to her final isolation, as do the interventions by professionals in the arena of 'political' spectacle (eg Audrey Wise).

8. All seven of the previous discourses together act as a carrier for the discourse of sexism (particularly evident in the union-discourse), spanning across the entire text, sometimes explicitly, sometimes in the form of an unspoken problem (eg in the employers' discourse). The inscription of the ideology of sexism is diffuse and fragmented because it does not relate exclusively to any single discourse or political/ideological position, but pervades a large number of them.

9. Throughout the film, a series of other devices punctuate the text. One such element is the repeated return of shots of women working in total isolation, at night, in big empty office blocks, suggesting that, although the struggle is going on and a large number of people are learning valuable political lessons, the cleaners are still working under appalling conditions. A fact which bears repeating. Another consistent feature of the film is its treatment of the individual workers, which one might call Brechtian in the sense that each worker is shown not only as a member of a class, sharing many characteristics with other members of that class, but also as an individual with more than just class characteristics. Finally, another punctuating device is worth noting: the use

of what Brecht called 'quotable gestures', such as the (slow motion) gestures of the black woman hovering an office, the wagging finger of the trade-union representative, etc. 111

C.1

None of these discourses in fact contains the truth of any of the others; none stands in a metalinguistic position vis-à-vis the others. On the contrary, each develops as a function of the discourses surrounding it. Moreover, each is tied directly to the concrete situation in which it occurs, to the historical phase of the struggle, and each is determined by the dynamic of that struggle. It is the viewer/reader who has to read the pattern of relations between the discourses and thus produce his or her own critical reading of that struggle. This means that the double learning process inscribed in the film (discourses 1 and 2) must be matched by a learning process in the viewer/reader, ie the learning processes forming the focus of the film must be completed by a corresponding learning, cognitive process in the reader.

It appears then that the structuring pattern of the film is provided by a double movement: on the one hand, there is the triple learning process contained within and produced by the interaction of the multiplicity of voices and which is shown to characterise this particular phase of the nightcleaners' struggle; on the other hand, there is the dialectic between the cleaners' work and the film-makers' work as manifested in the tensions and transformations at play between the filmic and cinematic codes described earlier. The relation between these two processes is itself a dialectical one; there is, as Walter Benjamin pointed out, a 'constant dialectic between the action which is shown . . . and the attitude of showing an action', which may be transformed to read: there is a constant dialectic between the learning process depicted and the depiction of a learning process.

C.2

In the present cultural context in Great Britain, *The Nightcleaners* figures as the most accomplished example of political cinema. But it would be wrong to assume that a mechanical repetition of its procedures is all that is now required. All elements present in the film are directly linked to the specificity of that particular phase of that particular struggle. The presentation of any other struggle would necessarily involve other 'discourses' and therefore different relations between discourses, and would not necessarily revolve around the learning processes dramatised in this film. This makes *The Nightcleaners* a unique text constructed according to the basic principle that historical events must be presented dialectically and that 'the point is to change it'. It is this very principle which also guided Brecht's theatre practice/theory and which dictated the devices he would use in any given circumstances.

However, I think that in relation to this film, it would be point-

112 less to talk of 'Brechtian influences', or of a conscious application of Brechtian devices. By asking the same questions Brecht asked about the mode of representation of a political struggle, the film-makers are impelled towards a re-invention of certain techniques, procedures and representational devices, pioneered by Brecht.

III

The Nightcleaners raises important issues for the development of political cinema in this country; if we take it seriously, it could provide a basis for a new direction in British film-making. At the same time, we think there are enormous problems involved – real barriers to such a development. In the first place, the lack of a critique of ideology and the state has been a persistent shortcoming of British film-making since Grierson, as Alan Lovell points out in *Studies in Documentary*. Grierson's essentially pragmatic stance saw no contradiction involved in making films about social reform within the context of state sponsorship, and one can see how his ideas in many ways affected the development of the 'free cinema' movement. On the other hand, attempts at making a radical break with this structure in the 1930's in the work of such people as Ivor Montagu, the Progressive Film Institute and the alternative 16mm distribution network Kino (despite their obvious interest as prototypes for alternative film-making practice today) tended to assume a retrograde and moralistic stance towards the whole question of the popular nature of the cinema, seeing the mass audience as drugged by an oppressive, monolithic cultural product into a uniform passivity.

Collective film-making groups could offer the possibility of a radical break with the social relations not only of production, but also of consumption, and it is only if these social relations are tackled at one and the same time that the retrograde aspects of the manipulation thesis can be successfully combatted. The analysis of film as an ideological product as well as a commodity means that it is necessary to work at the level of the social relations into which the cinema is inscribed in order to achieve a different constitution of the subject in terms of ideology. At the level of production, collective work, as Brecht observed, paves the way for an entirely different notion of artistic production and radically challenges assumptions about the artist in bourgeois society. But as Colin MacCabe pointed out earlier this week, collective work should not be simply defined as groups making democratic decisions, because the code of authorship comprises only one element in the totality of the film text. Brecht, as has been pointed out, did not in fact develop a theory of collective work in relation to independent cinema; nevertheless he did offer us one insight,

which is that it can only be really productive in terms of the kind of knowledge it produces. The practice of film-making involves, in these terms, not only control of the means of production but a struggle in ideology. At the level of consumption, showings of films in the women's movement and on the Left in general should be orientated much more towards challenging the artificial division between work, which is 'productive', and leisure which is seen exclusively in relation to consumption. New social relations of consumption for political cinema would involve creating a situation in which the viewer is not only able to participate, but is required to do so. The act of filming and the act of viewing comprise two moments of equal value, neither having priority over the other; just as the film-makers produce the film text, so the viewer must work on the film text – to achieve the process of meaning-production which is the film. It is particularly important that this work is carried out on the Left and in the women's movement at the present time, where political film is seen in the most functional and/or philistine terms and where the critique of film as an ideological product is almost totally absent. The kind of accompaniment of film which prevails at present involves using films as an excuse to discuss 'political issues'. Here it is the film itself which is seen as the 'political issue'.

A radical change in the social relations of production and of consumption at one and the same time highlights one final, central problem which is, of course, the present very sharp divide between political film-makers and film theorists. Our present mutual distrust is based on internalised remnants of the good old bourgeois distinction between 'doers' and 'thinkers'; the notion of the film-maker and the viewer both having an equal part to play in the process of text production offers some way out of this ideological impasse and moves towards the notion of a generalised activity of reading/writing as a pleasure/knowledge-producing process.

Discussion

Y: Could you clarify how the film was received?

Claire Johnston: On the whole it's been very badly received in the women's movement, especially perhaps by women who were very much involved in the campaign and saw the film originally as a campaign film. It was initially intended to be made in a *cinéma-vérité* manner (which produces rather interesting formal effects in that it's shot in one way and at the editing stage it was transformed into something else), there was a very close involvement between

114 the film-makers and women's liberation, and there were expectations that it would be a useful campaign film for the nightcleaners' struggle, but in terms of conventional notions of agit-prop, of course, the film didn't fulfil those needs at all.

Paul Willemen: Most of the real objections came from people not involved in cultural struggle at any level, people who tend to see their actions as interventions in economic struggles: the militant Left in general. I have very little information about the reception in the working class, but there would presumably be ideological difficulties, at least initially.

Y: Who would the campaign film have been shown to if the initial plan had in fact been carried out?

CJ: The purpose of the campaign film was to make money for the campaign and to generate interest and discussion about the issues within the women's movement and on the left in general. The idea was to make a film very rapidly in the manner of the Newsreel Collective now, who aim to make about a film a month, and to use that film as the abortion film has been used in the abortion campaign. Such films are seen as having a very short life, and being used for very specific purposes – a very functional, instrumental notion of cinema.

Y: Isn't it possible to combine both processes into one by filming in a *cinéma-vérité* way for use in a campaign, and then cutting something more culturally meaningful afterwards, using the same material?

CJ: That's a question of the work involved in making even the simplest film. The Berwick Street Collective work full-time at film-making, where most of the other groups, the Women's Film Group for example, can only do it in their spare time, and even the Berwick Street Collective have to do commercial work to support their political activities.

PW: But there are also serious ideological problems involved in the *cinéma-vérité* method with its ideology of transparency. To make a quick film like that might do more harm than good.

Martin Walsh: In your opening remarks about the nature of cinematic discourse itself, you said that in *The Nightcleaners* we are made aware of it at various levels. I agree that is so in the opening, but it seemed to reach a stasis very quickly, and the freeze-frames and slow motion later in the film seemed to me at least to sentimentalise and romanticise the issues in a manner reminiscent of the German New Objectivity of the 1920's or the Dorothea Lang/Eugene Smith photography of poverty. There's a high-angle close-up of the face of a cleaner in which her eyes gradually close in resignation. It's so emotionally loaded that it begins to eliminate the level that is there in the opening scenes.

PW: First of all, there is, as Claire pointed out, a tension in the film between the humanism and sentimentality involved in shoot-

ing cinéma-vérité and its transformation by other cinematic procedures. As for the sentimentality, which I would rather call emotion, in that particular shot, there is nothing inherently evil in having a certain emotion and identification provided it doesn't carry away the rest of the film. In this case, I don't think it does carry it away precisely because of the formal procedures which have been used to transform this essentially cinéma-vérité shot and the political weight put on it which is that of a contradiction for the working class. The sentiment is generated by the fact that you know she is going to die because of that contradiction.

MW: But there's a lack of any commentary on that when the image occurs, and such images occur at many points. You can't take a photograph and just leave it there, it needs some kind of commentary to clarify the meaning.

PW: I think the commentary on that meaning is precisely its insertion in a continuing series of shifting discourses. Its commentary is its political weight, the political load it carries. The sentimentality or emotion is a surplus. There is a humanist overtone, precisely because the film was shot in a cinéma-vérité style, but that is criticised because the cinéma-vérité has been dismantled.

CJ: That tension has been interpreted rather differently within the women's movement, where that manipulation of the image has been seen as an attempt to objectify women, ie as going against identification, towards objectification.

P: You talked about the black spacing between the images as one of the formal structures that criticise this use of the image. But the black spacing throws a great deal of weight on the image it surrounds, emphasising the absence of commentary. Where I thought this was most crucial was in the use of images of the family and children, which were given great weight as images but went uncriticised.

PW: Who were you expecting to criticise them? Those images of the family do have the connotations of family ideology, and this is linked to the other image we have been discussing, but it is one of the objects of the film to provoke the audience to criticise some of its images, as you are doing now. There are also wrong images in it.

C: The film started out visually as an agit-prop film and then through a radical reorganisation and distortion became a kind of theoretical film. Do you see this as a model for future production? Is it possible to conceive of films, perhaps for another kind of audience, that accept the tension between agit-prop and theory, or must theoretical films be made first and political films only later?

PW: In answer to your question I'd like to refer to a film which I would really call theoretical, rather than *The Nightcleaners*, and that is *Penthesilea*. That is a film which deals precisely with the theoretical problems of cinematic construction and the ideology

116 of patriarchy. *The Nightcleaners* does raise theoretical issues when compared with the dominant mode of making political films today, but it is not primarily concerned with those issues. The problem is whether a primarily political film of this type can proceed on these, for want of a better word, avant-garde notions of cinematic construction. I think it's an absolute necessity that it be tried, because at present I do not see any other form within British political film-making that counters the ideology of immediacy and transparency which is central to the notion of a coherent working class ideology, ie to workerism. I hope it is the first in a long and fruitful line. But obviously there are all the initial difficulties. Additional information and theory have to be supplied, at least initially, until the form has become a habit. But the primary function of *The Nightcleaners* is to create political knowledge. As far as I'm concerned I have learnt a lot about the politics of the nightcleaners' struggle from the film.

S: The most significant thing you seem to be saying about the film in the end, though, is that it's made in Britain. A lot of the claims you are making for its formal properties, and even to a certain extent about the way it presents the woman question, can be made for Godard's films. *Pravda* or *Le Gai savoir* or *Tout va bien* contain the techniques you have been discussing and the concerns you are articulating; the only significant difference about *The Nightcleaners* is the fact that it was made in Britain. Isn't that somewhat nationalistic?

CJ: It's not nationalistic. We're making an intervention in British film culture, and the last section of the Brecht Event is about the relevance or not of Brecht in Britain. As Alan pointed out yesterday, there is a tendency to look across the Channel for all one's cultural references. British cinema does present real problems, its conservatism must be confronted, and also the limitations posed by the lack of Marxist theory. The point about Brecht is that he came from a very vital Marxist tradition. You don't have that tradition here.

PW: I would agree that there are a lot of formal procedures which are very similar to those used by Godard, but it's very striking that some people who had been involved in the nightcleaners' struggle and had adored Godard as a great universal artist violently objected to *The Nightcleaners* applying those things at home. They were OK so long as they were exotically artistic over the Channel, but not once the point was a concrete analysis of a concrete situation that they were actively involved in and that they had to learn something about. And there is a crucial difference between this film and all Godard's, and that is the very fact that we talk about Godard. Even the Dziga Vertov Group is just a super-auteur; the notion of the individual artist is still at work. In *The Nightcleaners*, there is no artistic auteur at all.

Alan Lovell: I was puzzled by your use of 'discourse', which you

said was rather loose, and wasn't clear in what way you were using it, unless it was to cover up a problem about the author of the film. As I see it, your use of 'discourse' gives a sense that the film consists of various things that happen independently, there's a point outside the things actually occurring: there are some six 'discourses' playing in the film, all of which are independent and don't come from any central point. But it seems to me that you can't evade the fact that those discourses are always the work of a film-maker, whether it's a particular person, a collective or whatever. Even the fact that discourses are selected implies some point of choice. One thing that's quite striking in *The Nightcleaners* is the absence of any discourse about racialism, despite the presence of black cleaners and a very curious appearance of Indians on the anti-industrial-relations-act march shouting 'Heath out!'. That is a choice of the film-makers. There's a very definite point of view at work in the film.

PW: It was your own decision to set about constructing the author from the text after the event. Isn't that a politically dubious way of proceeding, the very fact that you should decide to do that?

AL: My point is to emphasise that these choices are being made, not to disguise it.

PW: One can criticise not so much the choice of images, but the political implications of the way the struggle has been represented, the framings, the elements present and so on. That is not at all to feel the need to have to attribute them to a source, to the subject that put them there in the first place.

AL: Let me put my point in another way. You say that there is no metalanguage, whereas essentially I'm arguing that there is.

Ben Brewster: No, there is certainly a standpoint, and Brecht always insisted that you couldn't produce any distance from the various typical actions in a work without making that work from a determinate standpoint, meaning of course a Marxist-Leninist standpoint. But that doesn't constitute it into an overarching discourse which relativises each of the subsidiary discourses, measures their truth and untruth.

AL: But there is a choice, a very important political choice, of the women's movement as against racialism.

BB: Yes, but that's rather like what we were saying about *If . . .* yesterday: you can attack that film on the grounds that it shouldn't have been made about a public school. In exactly the same way one might (of course I'm not) produce a critique of *The Nightcleaners* saying that it attacked the wrong problems, that the wrong discourses have been isolated. But again you could only do that from a specific political position.

Z: How is the film in fact being distributed?

Berwick Street Collective: As Claire said earlier, the film doesn't fulfil the messianic functions the organised Left – the Communist

118 Party, the International Socialists, the International Marxist Group, etc — require of a film. Our struggle is in a sense as much with the Left as it is with the film-making tradition we come from. The distribution will largely have to rest with us, for we have to struggle with the Left's notion, for example, of what the working class will understand, what they mean by understanding. If somebody doesn't understand something, and if in the middle of a viewing someone gets up and says, 'I'm bored to tears with this', we the film-makers have to be there to discuss it. The film isn't meant to be shown with everybody unanimously understanding it, it offers itself to be argued with. The film encourages argument, which the Left don't particularly like in a meeting. So we have to fight with them. At the moment it is a losing battle. The short term validity of agit-prop films at the moment is the fact that in a period when the revolutionary movement is at an extremely low ebb, you can send them by rail to someone who knows nothing about them but picks them up and shows them that evening to an audience which has no preparation for those particular films, and a certain minimum amount of information is conveyed and enthusiasm generated. The problems presented by a film like *The Nightcleaners* which demands so much energy and effort from the people who see it can't be resolved within the confines of that practice. It presupposes the development of an understanding of film on the part both of the people who are to see it and on that of the people who wish it to be seen. Whether in a few years time this is a film one would want to show is very much open to doubt, but it does pose a question about how films are seen at the moment.

S: But it is in fact distributed like that. I booked the film from the Other Cinema and they just put it on a train addressed to me.

Berwick Street Collective: The question is who are you, how did you hear about the film, and what was it that brought you to the point of asking to see that film? Did you go through the Other Cinema catalogue and decide by the title, well, I shall see that film because I like the subject, or had you heard something about it, or were you involved in the nightcleaners' struggle?

S: I work in a college of education and booked it in the context of studying documentary film-making.

Berwick Street Collective: Well, that's a very different notion of looking at films from that of most political audiences or film-makers.

CJ: That underlines the fact that there is a gulf between radicalism in film criticism, which already at this moment has a place in the educational structures, and radicalism in film practice. Trying to bridge that gulf is a massive problem in its own right. It is at the moment easier to use *The Nightcleaners* in film education than in any other way. That's not to invalidate talking about Brecht within an educational context, of course, but there remains the problem of bringing that discussion closer to film-making. That was one of the aims of an enterprise like this seminar.

Statement

Psychoanalysis and Film

Reference was made in the editorial in *Screen* v 16 n 2, Summer 1975, to reservations some members of the editorial board had about the recent use of psychoanalysis in *Screen* for understanding the cinema. We think it important to articulate these reservations because they are relevant not only to psychoanalysis but to the general task *Screen* has set itself over the past four years. Our reservations are in three main areas: the unproblematic acceptance of psychoanalysis implicit in the way it has been presented in *Screen*; the intelligibility of the various expositions and applications of it; and the validity of the attempts made to apply it directly to the cinema.

Like other members of the editorial board we accept that psychoanalysis is an intellectual discipline that may provide fruitful insights for film theory. However we feel that it has to be approached with a degree of critical caution since certain of its concepts and methods are undeveloped while others are matters of substantial debate both within psychoanalysis and outside it. There are two areas where these problems are of particular importance for the current use of psychoanalysis in film theory. The first is the account of women that is offered, the second, the interpretative method employed in the analysis of a patient's symptoms.

We will deal with these particular areas in relation to film theory later on. What we want to express first is our unease about the general lack of any critical distance from psychoanalysis in *Screen*. Without necessarily agreeing with all the criticisms Julia Lesage made of positions taken in the Brecht issue of *Screen*, we welcomed it and asked for it to be reprinted because it did demand that a critical debate about psychoanalysis be set going.

The assumption that psychoanalysis is a science seems to underpin the lack of a critical distance from it. A particular notion of what constitutes a science is invoked in making this assumption. The notion is derived from Louis Althusser and broadly holds that a science is defined by three features. It defines its own object (it does not take as its object of study the empirically given world

120 but discovers that object at another level – so psychoanalysis deals with the unconscious which is not something that can be empirically observed but something constructed by psychoanalytic theory). The second feature of a science is internal coherence and consistency. The third is its development of its own methods of testing and proof.

The use of this notion of science can't justify any easy confidence about the status of psychoanalysis as an intellectual discipline since it is itself a controversial one. Presently the philosophy of science is a confused and divided discipline with no general agreement about what constitutes a science or scientific method. It would be difficult to claim that Althusser's notion of science resolves the disagreements. On the key issue of what constitutes scientific proof (the popular notion that the 'truth' of scientific conclusions is guaranteed by experimental testing being no longer unquestioningly accepted) it effectively avoids the issue by claiming that a science develops its own methods of testing and proof and *in the last resort saying anything goes*.

The general position is further complicated by the particular version of psychoanalysis which is being drawn upon in *Screen*. This comes from Jacques Lacan's work which attempts to develop psychoanalysis by drawing upon structural linguistics. Initially Lacan's work presents problems in that it is notoriously difficult to understand his writings – this inaccessibility is a matter of a conscious intellectual strategy on the part of Lacan. Even amongst those who feel they properly understand his position there is disagreement about its value. Both from within psychoanalysis itself and from within the general structuralist ambience, Lacan's position has been attacked. Claude Lévi-Strauss has, for example, criticised some of Lacan's central positions:

'We do not feel any indulgence towards this imposture which would substitute the left hand for the right to give to the worst philosophy under the table that which one claims to have taken from it over the top; which, simply replacing the self (*moi*) by the other and slipping a metaphysic of desire beneath the logic of the concept, takes away the foundation of the latter. For, in replacing the self on the one hand by an anonymous other and on the other, by an individualised desire (no other is meaningful) one cannot succeed in hiding the fact that it is sufficient to stick them together and to turn the whole thing over to rediscover on the other side that self whose abolition one has proclaimed with a great show' (*L'Homme nu* p 562-3).

We cite Lévi-Strauss not to side with him against Lacan but to show that substantial intellectual choices are being made in using Lacan's account of psychoanalysis, as they are about the philosophy of science and the general adequacy of psychoanalytic positions. A film theorist does not have any special competence in

making such choices. In areas like psychoanalysis and philosophy of science she or he is likely to be at best a well-informed amateur. Crucially, in such a situation it is incumbent on a magazine like *Screen* to be as explicit as possible about its choices. 121

Screen seems to us to be deficient in this respect. Controversial intellectual choices are made to appear unproblematic. The appeal to science is central here. It is frequently made in the pages of *Screen*, not only in relation to psychoanalysis. The explicit appeal is always to the Althusserian notion of science but it would be impossible to learn from *Screen* that there are any problems about this. There is also an implicit appeal made to science that further confuses the situation and makes the choices being made harder to discern.

The implicit appeal is to the traditional notion of science as represented by disciplines like physics and chemistry. This appeal is made through the use of 'precise' terms, charts and diagrams which suggests a methodology that searches for abstraction and precision as the classical sciences are supposed to do. What these explicit and implicit appeals add up to is the attempt to bring the great prestige science has in our culture to support the use of disciplines like psychoanalysis. Inevitably this inhibits criticism.

Our second area of concern is the intelligibility of the various expositions and applications of psychoanalysis. Recurrently we find such expositions and applications are full of obscure passages so that the reading of *Screen* becomes a torment of endless re-readings in the effort to understand. We should say immediately that we don't think all ideas can be presented in simple terms but neither do we think that obscurity is a guarantee of profundity.

There are two different kinds of obscurity present in *Screen* that need to be separated out. The first kind is represented by the following passage:

'Jacques Lacan, the French psychoanalyst, has read Freud as reformulating the Cartesian cogito and destroying the subject as source and foundation – Lacan rewrites the cogito, in the light of Freud's discoveries as: I think where I am not and I am where I do not think. We can understand this formulation as the indicating of the fundamental misunderstanding (*méconnaissance*) which is involved in the successful use of language (or any other area of the symbolic which is similarly structured) in which the subject is continually ignored as being caught up in a process of articulation to be taken as a fixed place founding the discourse. The unconscious is that effect of language which escapes the conscious subject in the distance between the act of signification in which the subject passes from signifier to signifier and what is signified in which the subject finds himself in place as, for example, the pronoun 'I'. The importance of phenomena like verbal slips is that they testify to the existence of the unconscious through the

122 distance between what was said and what the conscious subject intended to say. They thus testify to the distance between the subject of the act of signification and the conscious subject (the ego). In this distance there is opened a gap which is the area of desire. What is essential to all of those psychic productions which Freud uses in the analytic interpretation is that they bear witness to the lack of control of the conscious subject over his discourses. . . . ' (*Screen* v 15 n 2, Summer 1974, p 17-18).

The whole passage is full of ambiguities and uncertainties. In the sentence beginning 'We can understand this formulation as . . .', who or what is doing the ignoring? And what should the phrase 'to be taken as a fixed place founding the discourse' be attached to, 'the process of articulation' or 'the subject'? In the next sentence what does 'the act of signification in which the subject passes from signifier to signifier' mean? How does the subject find himself in place in what is signified? Is 'what is signified' not part of 'the act of signification'? Later on in the passage another uncertainty is created when 'desire' is suddenly introduced without any explanation, a simple assertion being made that in the distance between the subject of the act of signification and the conscious subject there is opened a gap which is the area of desire.

The obscurity in this case is caused by the attempt to compress complicated ideas. Such a failure is likely to occur in any magazine. What concerns us about *Screen* is that the failure is so frequent. This frequency prevents us from explaining the failure as a local one on the part of editors or writers. It seems rather to come from a gap between editors/writers and (some?) readers. If you are familiar with the ideas of Lacan it is possible to fill in gaps and resolve ambiguities in a passage like the one we have quoted. If you're unfamiliar with the ideas it's impossible to do this. But since such a passage is clearly intended for those unfamiliar with Lacan's ideas, the failure is an important one for a magazine with the cultural aims of *Screen*.

The second kind of obscurity is more a matter of a particular strategy of writing. To cite a representative example of this strategy we have no clear notion of what the following passage means:

'The problem is to understand the terms of construction of the subject and the modalities of the replacement of this construction but also, more difficultly, the supplacement – the overplacing: supplementation or, in certain circumstances, supplantation (critical interruption) of that construction in its place of repetition' (*Screen* v 16 n 2, Summer 1975, p 87).

This is an example of a strategy of writing derived from Roland Barthes in which the use of 'precise' terms from other intellectual disciplines is combined with an interest in the play of language

(a play in this instance of the similar sounds in the words 'sup-
placement', 'overplacing', 'supplementation', 'supplantation').
The strategy seems to us a confusing one with the play of language
undermining the attempt to be precise.

To give a concrete example of the kind of confusion produced
(we need to move outside of the area of psychoanalysis for the
most convenient one): when the term 'diegesis' was introduced
into *Screen* we were assured it was a precise term not to be
confused with terms like 'fiction' or 'story'. In the analysis of
Touch of Evil (*Screen* v 16 n 2, Spring, 1975 p 11) we find the
following statement '... the synopsis is a narrative outline, the
statement of a kind of ideal entity – the narrative (the diegesis, the
story) – that can be realised in a range of matters. . . .' In this
the habitual putting together of synonyms seems to make
'diegesis' assimilable to 'story' and possibly to 'narrative' –
we're unclear what the function of the brackets is in this sentence.
We don't believe that *Screen's* efforts to present difficult and/or
unfamiliar ideas is helped by such a strategy of writing.

When an appeal to science is combined with the use of scientific
terms, it is possible to deal with the problem of obscurity through
believing that science is necessarily obscure and that a failure to
understand is therefore a failure on the part of the reader. We
know from our own experience that *Screen* often demoralises
readers in this way.

Our criticisms would be less urgent if it could be demonstrated
that the readership of *Screen* was likely to be generally familiar
with the intellectual territory that is being explored and aware of
choices that are being made. But we know this is not the case.
From our own experience of reading *Screen* and through our con-
tact with readers we have discovered immensely varying degrees of
knowledge of areas like psychoanalysis, Marxism, semiotics,
philosophy of science, etc.

Given such a readership we think the careful exposition of ideas
and clear indications of the issues involved in taking particular
positions must have a high priority. Unless it does there is likely
to develop amongst readers a lack of understanding and puzzlement
about positions expounded in *Screen* that will eventually lead to its
abandonment. We know this process is occurring in some measure
already (rather than stop buying *Screen*, it tends to be put on one
side to be read at an indefinite future date). And if *Screen* were
to lose many of its present readers with their involvement in the
education system, it would drift into a cultural void and become a
conventional academic magazine with a 'leftist' colouring and no
political situation in which it can specifically engage.

We don't see the careful exposition of ideas and the indicating
of intellectual choices as only a 'popularising' task – though we
regard this as important. *Screen* is not simply in the position of
having well worked out positions that it has to find the right way

124 of presenting to its readers. Given the undeveloped state of film theory in this country many of the positions taken in *Screen* are bound to be inadequate or confused. The effort to articulate positions as clearly and fully as possible will help to bring out those inadequacies and confusions and create some of the conditions for the kind of intellectual discussion necessary for the development of film theory and education.

Apart from general questions about the intellectual status of psychoanalysis and the obscurity with which it is often presented, there is also the question of the usefulness of the attempts to apply it to the cinema. There are two distinct areas where it has been applied, critical interpretation and the spectator's relationship with what he sees on the screen.

The use of psychoanalysis as a model for the process of critical interpretation is best represented by the *Cahiers du Cinéma* analysis of *Young Mr Lincoln* (translated in *Screen* v 13 n3). This analysis treats the film in a way analogous to the psychoanalyst's relationship with a patient, examining it for gaps and contradictions as indicators of the substantial forces at work in the film. In so far as it suggests another goal for criticism than the perfect and/or coherent work and reveals the waywardness with which ideology operates in a film we regard the analysis as an advance in film criticism. But we feel that its unawareness of the problems of critical interpretation needs to be criticised.

These problems are bound up with the analogy made with psychoanalytic methods of interpretation. These methods are themselves open to substantial objection. In his article 'The Freudian Slip' (*New Left Review*, 91) Sebastiano Timpanaro describes the problems surrounding Freud's methods of interpreting a patient's linguistic slips and argues that the methods are too unsystematic for one to have confidence in their validity. When this interpretative method is transferred to film criticism the objections become even stronger. The psychoanalyst at least has some definite idea of the structure of human psychology and the way that structure functions. She or he can then relate the gaps, slips and contradictions found in the patient's responses to something reasonably well defined. The analyst also has the patient's response (resistance) to his analytic conclusions as one kind of check on them. The critic has only the crudest notion of the structure of a film; some version of the form/content dichotomy – in the *Cahiers* analysis a distinction between ideology and writing. The way that even this crude structure functions is unclear. Does form determine content or vice versa? Or is the question a chicken and egg one, impossible to answer? And unlike the analyst the critic does not have the film's responses to his analysis as any kind of check on it.

In that its approach has a good deal in common with the analysis of *Young Mr Lincoln*, Stephen Heath's analysis of *Touch of Evil* (*Screen* v 16 n 1 and v 16 n 2, Spring/Summer, 1975) is open to

similar objections. Indeed the problems of interpretative method are much more sharply raised. In the analysis, important interpretative points often rest on the loose metaphorical use of language. For example, in trying to establish a relationship that is key for his analysis, one between the two couples, Vargas/Susan, the Blonde/Linneker, Heath argues 'Vargas is to Susan as Linneker to the Blonde, therefore if Linneker is torn to bits in the explosion, Vargas must be torn from Susan by the force of contagion' (p 57). A seeming similarity is set up by the use of the word 'torn' about both Linneker and Vargas/Susan and by the common associations of 'explosion' and 'force'. But 'torn' is Heath's choice of metaphor to describe what happens in the sequence. He nowhere demonstrates that the film encourages the critic to see what happens as a 'tearing' process. Why shouldn't we say that Linneker was 'blown' to bits except that we couldn't then go on to say that Susan was 'blown' from Vargas? The association of 'explosion' and 'force' is similarly loose. 'Explosion' might be agreed upon as a reasonably neutral way of describing what happens to the car with Linneker and the Blonde in it whereas 'force of contagion' is again a choice of metaphor which it is far from clear the film authorises.

Apart from this loose metaphorical use of language, the interpretative method is made even more arbitrary by the willingness to use any detail, however insignificant, in support of the general thesis so that, for example, the fact that an actor has the same name as a fictional character (Vargas) can be used as evidence of the relation between two fictional characters. It seems that in this analysis, one of the worst 'popular' effects of psychoanalysis is at work, the encouragement it is taken to give to ingenious interpretation where the ingenuity is thought to guarantee the interest of the exercise.

Effectively, it seems to us, that for all its theoretical ambitions what one is confronted with in the analysis of *Touch of Evil* is a critical interpretation not substantially different from critical interpretations offered by critics who make no use of psychoanalysis and whose intellectual perspective is very different. The method is a familiar one: interpretation mainly depends on an examination of narrative situations with occasional references to camera movements, sound, etc. The interpretative conclusion, that the film effects a denial of sexuality which is thought of as socially disruptive, not a particularly distinctive one. And overall there is the same sense of an arbitrary interpretative method at work.

Recently the most substantial and distinctive use of psychoanalysis in *Screen* has been the attempt to explain the relationship between the spectator and film. On the face of it the various attempts 'Lessons from Brecht' by Stephen Heath (*Screen* v 15 n 2, Summer 1974), the reply to Julia Lesage's criticism (*Screen* v 16 n 2, Summer 1975), 'The Imaginary Signifier' by Christian

126 Metz (*Screen* v 16 n 2, Summer 1975), 'Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema' by Laura Mulvey (*Screen* v 16 n 3, Autumn 1975) present a similar account of certain psychological processes at work in the cinema which make it a servant of the dominant ideology. This similarity is marked by the shared use in the articles of concepts like fetishism, voyeurism, the castration complex, the mirror phase.

When examined closely, it becomes clear that the appearance of similarity is in crucial respects deceptive. The psychoanalytic concepts are being used in different ways and for different purposes. Fetishism, for example, is central to Stephen Heath's account of how the cinema serves the dominant ideology and he sees it at work in all forms of representation. Christian Metz attaches fetishism more specifically to the cinema than Heath does. For Metz fetishism plays a more neutral ideological role. He uses it to deal with the problems of the suspension of disbelief and the general appeal the cinema has for its enthusiasts. For him the setting of the subject into position which like Heath he sees as the central ideological role of the cinema is explained by an appeal to the mirror phase. So the same conclusion about the ideological role of the cinema is backed by reference to two different psychological processes, fetishism and the mirror phase. Laura Mulvey provides a third account of the place of fetishism in the cinema, relating it to the way women, and the castration anxiety they are held to evoke, are treated.

The mirror phase is also used in different ways. Laura Mulvey makes a direct analogy between the cinema and the mirror phase, describing identification in terms of the spectator identifying with stars. Metz refuses such a direct analogy between the cinema and the mirror phase and produces a much more indirect analogy which leads him to describe identification in terms of the spectator's identifying with himself as 'pure act of perception'. In the reply to Julia Lesage there is a similar refusal of any direct analogy 'there is a relation between mirror phase and cinematic institution that should be examined, yet the condition of such an examination is exactly the non-reduction of the relation: nothing is to be gained by describing cinema as the mirror phase . . .' But we're not clear about what kind of analogy the reply seeks to maintain 'the crux is the relation, that is, the difference, the supplantation - refiguration of a subject-spectator who has already completed the mirror phase; it is the figure of the subject as turning point (circulation) between image and industry (poles of the cinematic institution) that demands study' (p 87). (Trying to understand the kind of analogy being proposed in this passage brings us up against the problems of writing strategy that we have already commented on. We find it very difficult to understand what demands study - why is it the *figure* of the subject rather than the subject? Is 'turning point' a metaphor? What is the relationship between 'turning

point' and 'circulation'. And if the subject spectator has completed the mirror phase what place does the mirror phase have in studying 'the figure of the subject as turning point between image and industry'?)

Ever since Freud first developed his ideas, psychoanalysis has been raided by other disciplines and some of its concepts appropriated. In the course of this appropriation, the concepts have usually become imprecise and devalued. We're concerned that the differing uses of psychoanalytic concepts in *Screen* may be a mark of this process occurring in film theory. One way the concepts might be prevented from becoming imprecise and valueless would be through the articulation and discussion of the differences in the various articles. This we see as an important part of the editorial work of *Screen* but one where it is again deficient. Neither in editorials or presentations are these differences pointed to.

In an area like the spectator's experience of the cinema it is particularly important to make this articulation because there is a view of the cinema that the accounts offered in *Screen* could easily slot into. Traditionally one view of the cinema has been a puritanical one where the spectator's experience is considered to be of a 'nasty' or 'perverted' kind. (Characteristically this puritanism has been class based and connected with a sense of the working class as barbarous.) It would be inaccurate to say that the articles in *Screen* simply support this puritanical view but it would be fair to say that there is enough ambiguity in the articles to create uncertainty about their position – they sometimes edge towards the reactionary view – Laura Mulvey, for example, does connect the cinema with the popular notion of perversion when in discussing the place of voyeurism in the cinema she writes 'At first glance the cinema would seem to be remote from the *undercover world of the surreptitious observation of an unknowing and unwilling victim*' (our italics) (p 9) but then goes on to suggest that the cinema is not so remote from that world.

We are also still concerned about the place women have in these psychoanalytic accounts. So far as we understand the reply to Julia Lesage's criticisms it appears to argue that women aren't allowed a place as spectators, they are 'a blind spot' for the cinema as it at present exists. Laura Mulvey's account also suggests that women are put into the position of being a blind spot since the audience implicit in her article is a male one. If patriarchal and/or bourgeois societies ignore women in this way in forms like the cinema, if there is not to be a tacit acceptance of this ignoring, it is urgent to examine the consequences of women being a blind spot. How do women relate to the films they see if the cinema is constructed for a male audience? Although it can be argued that women have been conditioned to accept the same way of seeing as men, they must be in a potentially anomalous and contradictory position within the viewing structures described here.

128 It is, of course, possible that the blind spot is not created by patriarchal or capitalist societies but by psychoanalytic theory. Freud's account of women is still controversial and we certainly don't feel ready to take final positions in that controversy. In this connection we're uneasy about the uncritical acceptance of Juliet Mitchell's defence of Freud in her book *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*. Whatever its undoubted merits *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* can hardly be thought to have resolved the problems in a decisive way. It would be hard to gather from the pages of *Screen* that the book has produced a substantial debate both within the socialist and feminist movements. (For a lucid exposition and defence of the book see Christopher Lasch's review in the *New York Review of Books*, October 3, 1974. For criticisms of varying degrees of severity see as well as Liz Long's review cited by Julia Lesage, 'Male Supremacy and the Unconscious' by Eli Zaretsky in *Socialist Revolution* 21-22, Richard Wolheim's article in *New Left Review* 93 and Mark Poster's review in *Telos* 21, Fall 1974.)

One further point needs to be made about this particular attempt to apply psychoanalysis to the cinema. Too often abundant reference to psychoanalysis distracts attention from dubious arguments. The account of representation in terms of fetishism in 'Lessons from Brecht' is a case in point. Freud's description of a specific case of fetishism is summarised. The case turns on a play between the English word 'glance' and the German word 'glanz' which means 'gleam, brilliance, shine'. Fetishism in the cinema is then closely allied to this particular case because of the special appropriateness of words like 'glance, gleam, brilliance, shine' to the cinematic situation. 'The fetish is indeed a brilliance, something lit up, heightened, depicted as under an arc light, a point of (theatrical) representation; hence the glance: the subject is installed (as at the theatre or at the movies) for the representation. . . .' (p 107).

But not all cases of fetishism depend on the play of words that are appropriate to the cinematic situation and it is therefore misleading to try and attach the concept of fetishism to the cinema on the basis of local coincidence.

Moreover the argument is basically irrelevant to the main argument about fetishism and representation. The main argument is put in the following way

'The structure of representation is a structure of fetishism: the subject is produced in a position of separation from which he is confirmed in an imaginary coherence (the representation is the guarantee of his self-coherence) the condition of which is the ignorance of the structure of his production, of his setting in position' (p 106).

We take this argument to mean that two situations are being related to each other. The first is the fetishistic one described by

Freud. The fetishist cannot come to terms with the woman's seeming lack of a penis because of its threat of castration. He finds a fetish for the missing penis in some other object (the fetish). This process allows him to operate on the illusory basis that he has come to terms with the initial situation. The second situation is that of a representation system (theatre, cinema, etc). This system is thought to disguise the way it operates and therefore leaves the spectator unaware of the contradictions of her or his existence and allows her or him to maintain the illusion that she or he is a coherent being (a subject).

If we have followed the account of these two situations properly (and leaving aside whether they are true or meaningful) it seems illegitimate to claim that the structure of representation is a structure of fetishism. The two situations are very different; in the situation of the representation system there is no equivalent of the initial discovery of the woman's lack of a penis in the fetishist situation. All the two situations have in common is a structural similarity in that in both something is disguised from the people involved and that disguising process allows the people to continue to function but in ignorance of their real position. It is hard to see what useful conclusion can be drawn from this structural similarity. All the argument seems to achieve is the implication that representation systems are somehow perverse (in the popular sense of that word) – all the spectators in the cinema are fetishists.

We find the same elusiveness in Metz's account of the mirror phase in relation to the cinema. After convincingly showing that no direct analogy can be drawn between the mirror phase and the cinematic situation, Metz maintains the analogy by arguing that the spectator identifies with himself as 'a pure act of perception'. But what meaning can be given to such a notion? It suggests an extraordinary feat of psychological gymnastics.

Beyond the confines of a debate about psychoanalysis, we are finally concerned about the politico-cultural position psychoanalysis is being used to sustain. In broad outline it is the familiar high-bourgeois one that sadly has been all too prevalent in the Marxist tradition and helped to block the development of any adequate account of the role of art in mature capitalist societies. An ill-defined monolith (sometimes described as classic American cinema, sometimes as mainstream cinema) produces a passive audience, which is also conceived as a monolith and never investigated. The effective conclusion of this account is then the validation of avant-garde art (Godard, Oshima, Straub or more generally, the counter cinema) as against any other.

If we try to translate this position into educational terms (and any positions developed in *Screen* ought to have some relevance to film education) we reach the position that educationalists have been uneasy about for a number of years where the education system deprives working class children of their own cultural values

130 and offers middle class ones in their place. By saying this we are not arguing that working class values are sacrosanct but suggesting the need to carefully scrutinise positions that seek to replace them. If SEFT is to contribute to the development of film education it is important that its commitments to film and education should be brought to bear on each other.

In relation to psychoanalysis our general conclusion is, to return to a point made at the beginning of this article, that a greater critical distance is needed. It is at this point it seems to us that there are the strongest divisions between our position and that of other members of the board. Much of the writing about psychoanalysis comes from a commitment that doesn't allow a critical distance to be taken. The presentation of Lacan's ideas (*Screen* v 16 n 2, Summer 1975) provides a convenient example of how this commitment blocks criticism. We believe that no socialist educationalist could be happy with Lacan's authoritarian account of the learning process,

'The master breaks the silence with a sarcasm, a kick – anything at all. It is thus in the quest for meaning that a Buddhist master proceeds according to Zen technique. For it is the pupils' business to seek the reply to their own questions. A master does not teach ex cathedra a completed science; he brings forth the reply when his students are on the point of discovering it themselves.' (Our italics.)

Yet this is enthusiastically presented as an example of Lacan's unorthodoxy.

Lacan's position as presented raises many of the problems that have become familiar in discussion of F R Leavis's critical position – the refusal of a metalanguage, the attempt to explicate concepts only by showing them at work. Indeed in confronting the use of Lacanian concepts in *Screen* we have come up against one of the special problems of Leavisite criticism, the use of terms whose repetition suggests they are important for the system of thought but whose meaning is hard to specify.

Screen has often been criticised as parasitic on ideas developed elsewhere. We reject this criticism in that we regard it as important to make available ideas which seem potentially fruitful wherever they are first developed. But the criticism has force if the ideas are presented and used uncritically without a sufficient awareness of the political situation they are likely to operate in. Which brings us back to *Screen*'s relationship with its readers – the fundamental issue underlying the particular discussion of psychoanalysis we have tried to open up.

EDWARD BUSCOMBE
CHRISTOPHER GLEDHILL
ALAN LOVELL
CHRISTOPHER WILLIAMS

Edited by Edward Buscombe

Cuts at the Slade

The last issue of *Screen Education*, n 16, Autumn 1975, raised questions of the effect that the educational cuts, resulting from the current recession, have for film education. There is a clear instance of this in the proposals for severe curtailment of the work of the Slade Film Unit, now under discussion in University College, London (of which the Slade School of Fine Arts is a department).

A course in film study was initiated at the Slade in 1960 by Thorold Dickinson, who was appointed to a personal chair in film in 1967. James Leahy currently directs film studies. The unit has built up a two-year full-time postgraduate diploma course in film studies and recently an MPhil course open to full-time and part-time students. The unit also provides teaching and facilities for the rest of the Slade and University College, has made a number of documentary films, and initiated the Slade Film History Register. Slade students are making increasing contributions to the development of film culture in Britain and internationally. As the only full-time course in film studies in the country it has been an important example and precedent for initiating other courses in film in higher education (Newcastle, Warwick, Exeter).

The continued existence of the unit in its present form is threatened by proposed cuts in its budget and the closure of the post-graduate diploma course. When the new Slade Professor of Fine Art, Lawrence Gowing, took up his post this October (on the retirement of Sir William Coldstream) he discovered that cuts of the order of £12,000 were necessary to avoid deficit in the Slade's budget. After reviewing the Slade School's work as a whole it seemed to him that the only area which could be cut back without severely undermining the whole functioning of the school, was that of film studies. (Spreading the cuts across the Slade as a whole could result in a reduction of anything between 25 per cent and 50 per cent in the level of the Slade's activities.) Consultations are at present going on with staff and students as to the implementation of the cuts.

The first meeting of staff and students was held on November 18; the Slade's rationale for the cuts ran as follows:

1. The lack of funds was placed squarely on the refusal of the

132 Department of Education and Science to make up departmental grants to a level to cover inflation. This has hit the Slade particularly hard in the areas of materials, visiting lecturers and part-time staff, who provide an important part of the teaching of art at the Slade, but whose salaries must be paid out of departmental funds, unlike staff on contract whose salaries are paid out of college funds which the DES protects from inflation.

2. Since Professor Gowing's brief on appointment was to strengthen the undergraduate work, and 'protect' the postgraduate work in fine arts, that left only the film unit open to cuts. Gowing stressed the centrality of the fine-arts work to the Slade's conception of itself. (The Slade has made an important contribution to the history and conception of the art school, and has been represented in many of the developments of British painting and sculpture in the last hundred years.) To spread the cuts throughout the school would 'threaten the existence of the school as we understand it'.

3. Consequently it is up to the film unit to make the necessary sacrifice, though that entails changing the whole basis of film studies at the Slade. It is proposed to centre the cuts on the most cost-intensive area of the unit's activities, the screenings, of which there are at present four a week. This would mean effective abandonment of the diploma course, since it would be impossible to provide sufficient screenings to teach film history. Most of the cuts would be delayed until the current diploma students had completed their work. The film unit's work would then be redefined, confining itself to doctoral research and some service teaching.

It was stressed that this was not the first step in a campaign to cut off different sections of the Slade.

From the situation outlined above it is clear that arguments about the implementation of cuts in educational expenditure inevitably involve decisions on educational priorities within that institution. In the ensuing debates it is very easy for implicit assumptions about the relative lack of importance of film studies to gain ground. In University College I would say that film is at the bottom of the hierarchy: academic work/fine arts work/film work. To question that hierarchy not only raises issues of film education, but also of the role of the art school in the educational system.

The decision about the cuts has already been made. The only way to reverse it is by persuading the Provost of University College and the College's finance committee that the importance and uniqueness of the film unit necessitate exceptional prudence in reducing the expenditure of the Slade.

MARK NASH

As Screen goes to press we learn that a supplementary grant to the Slade will allow another intake of diploma students. This good news does not detract from Mark Nash's major thesis; the fragility of film studies even in institutions where they are well established.

This account of some courses taught last year at the Centre d'Etudes Universitaires Américain du Cinéma provides a point of comparison with film study work being done in this country at higher education level. Screen and Screen Education will from time to time be publishing accounts of teaching at British universities, polytechnics and film schools.

Some of the courses described below are being repeated at the Centre this year. Further details can be obtained from Mary Milton, Council on International Education Exchange, 777 United Nations Plaza, New York, New York 10017, USA.

The Centre d'Études Universitaires Américain du Cinéma à Paris is a programme organised jointly through the University of California and the Council on International Educational Exchange in New York. The programme is intended principally for graduate students in film theory, though it is appropriate for undergraduates with adequate background; its bias is structural-semiological. The opportunity to work with Christian Metz and several students of Metz may be considered its primary attraction. Courses are held in cooperation with the Department of Cinema at Censier, a branch of the University of Paris otherwise known as Paris III, but are (apart from several I did not attend) restricted to the American students in the programme. Courses at Censier, and for that matter the whole University of Paris system, are open to the American students, although not as an official part of the programme. Although the programme's structure did limit contact with French students, this was nonetheless made up for by the pains most of the teachers (teaching in French) took to make themselves understood by people like myself, with a limited background in French. Thus, my two years of college French as an undergraduate proved quite adequate for my needs.

The year was organised into four quarters of about eight weeks each. Each class generally met about once a week for several hours at a time. Several courses, started in either the first, summer session, or the second which began in November, and continued throughout the whole year. Thus, these courses maintained considerable continuity from quarter to quarter.

Initiation to Film – Jacques Aumont (5 hours, summer quarter)

This course, which met two afternoons a week, was not so much an initiation to film as an initiation to recent French film thought. The professor, Jacques Aumont, is a former editor of *Cahiers du Cinéma* and a scholar of the Russian cinema who has translated many of Eisenstein's writings into French. A film was screened at each session. Among the topics were: the nature of the 'classic' cinema (Ford's *Young Mr Lincoln*, Hawks's *Only Angels Have Wings*, Rossellini's *Open City*); cinema as a dream medium, the

134 presentation of different levels of reality (Buñuel's *The Criminal Life of Archibaldo de la Cruz*); film as a medium reflecting historical, political and economic realities (Lang's *Dr Mabuse, the Gambler*); some recent thinking about montage (Griffith's *Intolerance*); formalism and idealism in the cinema (Dreyer's *Gertrud*); films which break with the classic model and work from materialist premises (Godard's *Les Carabiniers*, Straub's *Unreconciled*, Rocha's *Antonio das Mortes*); the influences of Rouch (Rouch's *La Pyramide Humaine*, Rivette's *Céline and Julie Go Boating*); Oudart's notion of the 'suturing' of cinematic space and Bresson's breaking of the rules of 'the suture' (*Au Hasard, Balthazar*). The course was particularly valuable in establishing what many of the issues are in recent French film criticism.

Introduction to Semiology and The Film Work – Thierry Kuntzel (4 hours each, each quarter: summer, fall and winter quarters for semiology; fall and winter quarters for *Work*)

Thierry Kuntzel, a young, but already rather accomplished student of Metz, considers these two courses to be so closely related that together they form a whole. They alternated every Friday for marathon, all-afternoon sessions, and continued for the whole year. Kuntzel works from the premise that in every film there are two subjects – one, the projected film, as seen in a theatre; the other, the celluloid itself, which can be viewed on an editing table, studied, stopped, manipulated at will. Thus, each course involved part theory, part actual study of films in the form of shot-by-shot analysis. 'Introduction to Semiology' consisted of lectures and readings in semiology alternating with practical applications in the study of American fantastic films of the 1930's – *The Most Dangerous Game*, *King Kong*, *Island of Lost Souls*, *Freaks*, *The Devil Doll* (as well as additional study of Robison's *Warning Shadows* and Dreyer's *Vampyr*). These films were found to be particularly well suited to this work because of their strict adherence to classic narrative models and for their externalisation of many obvious psychological elements. Since much semiological work is now grounded in Freud and seeks, with Lacan, to link Freudian psychoanalysis to linguistics, the task was often to see these films as dreams. We looked for condensation, displacement and symbolism with a degree of thoroughness I had, frankly, never before imagined possible.

The Film Work was equally involved with psychoanalysis and linguistics, applying similar methodologies to narrative films like *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* and later to more complex, less narrative works like Dziga Vertov's *The Man with the Movie Camera*, Chris Marker's *La Jetée*, and finally to several examples from the American underground cinema. But *The Film Work* was a more loosely structured class, with fewer lectures and a freer, workshop format. It sought to discover what linguistically based methodo-

logies would be viable for the analysis of non-narrative films. Again, the class was valuable not only for the theoretical lines it exposed me to, but also for its demonstration of the value of painstaking, shot-by-shot analysis. 135

The American Narrative Model and Its Variations – Pascal Kané (5 hours, fall quarter)

Also taught by a writer for *Cahiers du Cinéma*, this class met two mornings a week for the single fall quarter. Again, in-class analyses of specific films alternated with lectures. While also very much influenced by Lacan, Kané rejects semiology as being too descriptive and not adequately focussed ideologically. Rather, he seeks to unite a psychoanalytic approach with a political one, based largely on Brecht. The greater part of the class was spent in a detailed analysis of the two parts of Lang's first *Dr Mabuse* film, which Kané sees as an archetypal model for the American cinema to follow it. According to Kané, the classic American film has, in general, a passive, impotent, castrated hero, which is part of a systematic set of devices unconsciously used by the Hollywood film to render the audience passive (and presumably uncritical) as well. Traditional cinematic technique emphasises this passivity. This inscription of the audience into the film becomes a third of a larger, triple inscription, which includes one figure to represent the director himself (for example, Mabuse), and another to represent the law or super-ego. Conflicts among the three figures are generally over power, which is usually seen in phallic terms; women are fetishised; political conflicts are most frequently transferred to and resolved on sexual grounds rather than political ones.

Following the study of *Dr Mabuse*, we applied these ideas to Welles's *The Lady from Shanghai*, and John Ford's *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, to see how the model could be changed and varied, yet still remain very definitely a model. Although Kané was a thoroughly disagreeable teacher, his ideas were strong enough to make the class profitable.

The Aesthetics of Film – Jean Mitry (4 hours, winter quarter)

These once a week, two-hour lectures were, unfortunately, disappointing. The chance to study with a figure of Jean Mitry's stature is, of course, something to raise one's expectations particularly high. Thus, even though I had been warned that his class had been unsuccessful the preceding year, I felt obligated to find out for myself. His initial lectures on the relationship between film and perceptual psychology were fine, although they contained nothing that one couldn't get from his books. In addition, Mitry would criticise semiology on the most superficial levels of definition, which would only produce endless circular discussions. (Of course, Metz means something different from Mitry when he uses words like 'language' and 'code', but neither Mitry nor the more

136 argumentative students would see that the two are almost always in complete agreement except for these definitions.)

The French Cinema Since the New Wave – Michel Marie (4 hours, spring quarter)

This is one of the few strictly historical classes that I took this year. The films screened and discussed, one each week, were Jacques Rozier's *Adieu Philippine*, Jacques Demy's *Lola*, Claude Chabrol's *Les Bonnes Femmes*, Chris Marker's *Le Joli Mai*, Jacques Rivette's *La Religieuse*, Alain Resnais's *Muriel*, Marguerite Duras's *La Femme du Ganges*, Walerian Borowczyk's *Goto, Island of Love*, Agnès Varda's *Opéra Mouffe* and Alain Robbe-Grillet's *L'Eden et Après*. All of these films are difficult to see in the United States; some just about impossible. While some of the material in the course was familiar to me, much of it did help me see the New Wave and the period following it in new contexts. It allowed for the correction of some of the biases that are due quite naturally to viewing the French film scene from the United States.

Film as Commodity – Pierre Baudry (4 hours, spring quarter)

A course with an openly Marxist, materialist, economic bias, 'Film as Commodity' sought to examine the nature of film as an object of commerce rather than a form of artistic or personal expression. Readings and lectures attempted to apply certain principles of economic theory to the cinema. In addition, we were assigned to see certain films playing in Paris at the time, mostly of a particularly commercial nature (eg *Young Frankenstein*, *That's Entertainment*, *Earthquake*, *A History of the Blue Movie*, a karate film, an Italian western, plus any probable box-office failure of our choice). Students were reimbursed for the cost of these films, which were then discussed in the framework of their commercial properties, ie, in terms of what they offered the consumer. The seminar, which met once a week for two-and-a-half hours, was loosely organised, and structured in its later weeks around student presentations on various topics related to the general subject. Also a former *Cahiers* figure, Baudry is currently involved in the production of a film in Germany, for which he has co-authored the screenplay.

Le signifiant imaginaire – Christian Metz (4 hours, spring quarter)

Metz's lectures, two hours a week, were based on his latest research, which he describes as an attempt at the 'psychoanalysis of cinematographic institutions'. (The lectures corresponded basically to his article 'The Imaginary Signifier' in *Screen* v 16 n 2, Summer 1975.) Metz is a particularly good seminar leader. While he covered the material at hand most effectively, he also made particular effort to be open to questions, to relate it to the students' individual interests, to accept questioning and criticism of his

own assertions with a spirit of mutual exploration, and to put his study into a broad, inter-disciplinary range of context. 137

This study broke down into three sub-topics: 1. the nature of cinematic identification; 2. scopophilia and voyeurism; 3. what might best be translated by the English expression 'willing suspension of disbelief'. Time allowed only for detailed treatment of the first two. As its substance is already familiar to readers of *Screen* I shall not summarise it in detail.

In its provocative theorisation, representing original thinking on Metz's part and also drawing on several disparate sources of thought on film and psychology in France today, *Le signifiant imaginaire* put much of what I had studied all year into a far more precise context, summarising much of the year for me, even while it presented new material as well.

Cinema and Surrealism – Jean-Paul Török

I did not take this course officially, but rather sat in on most of the lectures. Since Török has been a key figure at *Positif* I was interested in what he would have to say. While much of the historical material dealing with the surrealist movement was not new to me, Török did provide me with many small insights into the way surrealism has affected a certain branch of French film criticism. The class was a part of the film programme at Censier, in the University of Paris.

French classes

French classes were provided as part of the programme, on an intensive two or three-hour daily level for the first eight weeks, then on a weekly basis afterwards. These were certainly an aid in bringing my linguistic skills up to a more workable level. Needless to say, the experience of living in France and taking classes in French does much to improve speaking, writing and comprehension.

In terms of fulfilling my general goals, I consider my year in France to be a very certain success. I certainly do have a far greater familiarity with film semiology than I could ever have obtained in the United States. And what is more, it is the semiology of 1975, rather than the semiology of 1969. (It was a frequent complaint of Kuntzel that so many would-be semiologists abroad have not kept up with more recent developments in the field.)

The extension of the structural-linguistic approach to psychoanalysis is an important turn of events, and certainly one which makes the linguistic aspects a little less rarefied and pedantic, a little less theoretically dry and seemingly inapplicable. The examination of the psychological positions in which films, by means of their structural elements, customarily put their spectators, is of key importance to an understanding of the way shots and scenes

138 are to be interpreted. Particularly valuable was the chance to see, by immersing myself in a Parisian intellectual environment, the context for all these ideas. So much of the intimidating and seemingly pedantic vocabulary of someone like Metz begins to make far more sense when one can experience it and hear it applied in more concrete discussions, in contexts less rigid than that of the printed page. Even more encouraging is the fact that the semiologists themselves are not all that insistent on the maintenance of a rigorous terminology; rather it is a set of central ideas and concepts about film that interests them. As a talker, Metz's language is far more colloquial and down to earth than most of the writing in his books. The popularity of detailed, exhaustive and scientific analyses of films may be the chief result of this school of thought. Michel Marie, for example, has co-authored a detailed, book-length analysis of Resnais's *Muriel*, which is being hailed as a landmark work, one of the first books really to go beyond superficial journalism and onto the level of serious, detailed textual analysis. The common prediction is that the book is only the first of many. The year provided me with an introduction to the methodologies whereby these analyses are being conceived and executed.

Nonetheless, I hardly consider myself a total convert to the semiological approach. While Metz and his followers give their research a conceptual rigour that is admirable in that it makes their study more systematic and less subjective, their results are often no more revealing than would be the results of *any* serious, intelligent, careful analysis of the same given cinematic text. That one might learn as much about the film without all the accompanying elaborate (and sometimes questionable) theorisation hardly negates the theories, but it does call their usefulness into question. In addition, some of the assertions about psychoanalysis and cinema seem to me to border on mysticism rather than science, although they are certainly systematically thought out enough to merit serious consideration. I am far more positive about the politicisation of French film criticism, which stands to be one of the most important developments in film at the present time. I am convinced that in terms of what kind of fiction films *should* be made, Brecht is the theorist to contend with. The central question of how form affects content is one of the knottiest of our time, and no other writer about theatrical aesthetics calls into question what the relationship between film and spectator *should be* with the same degree of modernity. Yet this reaction is not only based on theories and readings, it has an empirical side: almost invariably the most interesting new films (and plays) that I saw in Paris were Brechtian in approach to some degree or another.

Still, won over as I may be to the principle of politicised cinema, I remain fascinated almost to the point of intellectual paralysis by the range of prescriptive assertions this seems to produce. At one

extreme one may find the 'old left' figures at *Positif* praising the most traditional Hollywood genre films as politically advanced, a position I find as incredible as that of Jean-Marie Straub's assertion that he makes his doggedly minimalist, fanatically theoretical films 'for the workers and peasants'. To say that all film is political is by now the most banal truism, but assuming that films do exist in a world other than the one they create, it is one of the most important cultural considerations to be faced by the critic. One of my goals as a film scholar must now be, without sacrificing an open mind, to reach some more decisive conclusions about the question.

GEORGE LELLIS

Days of Hope

When I was asked to contribute a piece on *Days of Hope* to the Film Culture section of *Screen*, my initial impulse was to produce something which concentrated almost exclusively on the limitations of *Days of Hope* on account of its commitment to realist/naturalist forms; on an examination of the BBC's conception and presentation of *Days of Hope*; and on an examination of the kind of public discussion which has surrounded it – all of these critiques mounted from what could broadly be called the *Screen* perspective. These critiques are very necessary and I shall duly proceed to them, but a piece which ended there would confer on my particular application of 'the *Screen* perspective' a certainty which I am very far from feeling. I really want to write an altogether more tentative piece which, as well as posing *Days of Hope* as problematic, poses *Screen*, the nature and style of the interventions it makes and, in particular, its position on realism/naturalism, as equally problematic. I am aware of a certain risk in being critical of *Screen*. The anti-intellectual lobby is quite liable to pick up such criticisms and use them unscrupulously. Let me say, therefore, that the problematic areas I point to later in this piece should not be interpreted anywhere as a rejection of the real advances *Screen* has wrought in discourse about film and television in Britain. My main concern is that these advances are not as widely understood as they should be.

The BBC was in something of a cleft stick over *Days of Hope*. On the one hand, it sought public praise for its 'liberalism' in putting it on, but on the other hand, it did not want to draw too much attention to it as a special political event. The BBC's strategy, therefore, was to present the programmes as mutedly as their objective importance would allow, and at the same time to insist that this was Art and not Politics. The *Radio Times* of September 6-12, the week the four-part *Days of Hope* began, carried a four-

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Days of Hope

When I was asked to contribute a piece on *Days of Hope* to the Film Culture section of *Screen*, my initial impulse was to produce something which concentrated almost exclusively on the limitations of *Days of Hope* on account of its commitment to realist/naturalist forms; on an examination of the BBC's conception and presentation of *Days of Hope*; and on an examination of the kind of public discussion which has surrounded it – all of these critiques mounted from what could broadly be called the *Screen* perspective. These critiques are very necessary and I shall duly proceed to them, but a piece which ended there would confer on my particular application of 'the *Screen* perspective' a certainty which I am very far from feeling. I really want to write an altogether more tentative piece which, as well as posing *Days of Hope* as problematic, poses *Screen*, the nature and style of the interventions it makes and, in particular, its position on realism/naturalism, as equally problematic. I am aware of a certain risk in being critical of *Screen*. The anti-intellectual lobby is quite liable to pick up such criticisms and use them unscrupulously. Let me say, therefore, that the problematic areas I point to later in this piece should not be interpreted anywhere as a rejection of the real advances *Screen* has wrought in discourse about film and television in Britain. My main concern is that these advances are not as widely understood as they should be.

The BBC was in something of a cleft stick over *Days of Hope*. On the one hand, it sought public praise for its 'liberalism' in putting it on, but on the other hand, it did not want to draw too much attention to it as a special political event. The BBC's strategy, therefore, was to present the programmes as mutedly as their objective importance would allow, and at the same time to insist that this was Art and not Politics. The *Radio Times* of September 6-12, the week the four-part *Days of Hope* began, carried a four-

140 page book spread of text and pictures (the kind of coverage an important new series would get) but significantly (and unlike its coverage of the near-concurrent series *The Explorers*) did not feature *Days of Hope* on its cover, which was given over to pictures of a new current-affairs 'personality'.

The *Radio Times* comment on *Days of Hope*, stressing, as it did, history as simply 'the setting for a series of four new dramatic films' and captioning photographs of two of the three major characters in terms relating to the individual psychology of these characters, was at odds with the way Tony Garnett, Ken Loach and Jim Allen discussed the series in the accompanying interview (eg 'Our motive for going to the past is not to escape the present: we go into the past to draw lessons from it. History is contemporary'). The *Radio Times* interviewer was himself at some pains to depoliticise (in his terms) *Days of Hope*, most notably in the anecdote with which he concludes his piece. Having recorded Jim Allen's comments on the treachery of the TUC, the Labour Party and the Communist Party during the General Strike, the interviewer quotes the view of Karl Radek ('one of the leading Bolsheviks who opposed Stalin') to the effect that the General Strike was not a revolutionary movement, but a wage dispute.

The BBC's insistence on the separation of Art and Politics (a separation adamantly maintained by many TV critics in the public discussion following the screenings) reached its apotheosis in the remarks of Shaun Sutton, Head of BBC Drama, on the *Tonight* programme of October 3 when he indicated that of the last eight hundred plays the BBC has transmitted, only ten were 'political', in Sutton's terms: ie their subject-matter was politics and history.

The quality of the public discussion following *Days of Hope* cannot have been pleasing for Garnett, Loach and Allen. Setting aside the charges of propaganda and 'lack of objectivity' – charges made, of course, only against programmes which challenge the dominant ideologies in our society – a disproportionate amount of comment was on two themes: one, that *Days of Hope*, whatever its political position, was 'great art'; and, two, that the lovingly created background detail was, in one or other respect, inaccurate. It is here that the limitations of *Days of Hope*'s commitment to realist/naturalist forms becomes manifest, for by deploying certain strategies: classical narrative, individuated characters, and, most particularly, the great stress on the accuracy of costume, set decoration and the other inert elements of the profilmic event, *Days of Hope* creates the space for the kind of tangential criticism which dominated public response. Its authors' refusal to countenance auto-reflexive devices, ie devices which directly create an awareness of the process of production, guaranteed that much critical response would take the irrelevant lines it did. To be assertive for a moment, it is reasonable to expect an allegedly radical film to tell us something about the problems of making

films for a large broadcasting institution within a dominant artistic discourse as well as about the 'reality' it signifies. One is bound to be suspicious, at the very least, of the anti-intellectualism and mystification suggested by Tony Garnett's remarks when questioned about work methods – 'I think it's counterproductive to define the way we work because once you've done it we might not be able to do it any more . . . I don't think people want to know all these details: what they're interested in is the way the films look and what they're saying.' I have drawn attention above to the kind of public discussion which followed *Days of Hope* and it is here that I would like to begin to air the reservations I have about *Screen*, the nature and style of its interventions into British film and television culture, and the degree of certainty with which it presents its position.

The public debate following *Days of Hope* was characterised by double-think and intellectual poverty, but it was, nevertheless, a considerably public and general debate to which *Screen* might have brought a good deal of sense and intellectual sophistication regarding the relationships among politics/history/aesthetics had it produced an *issue* coinciding with the appearance of, and devoted to, *Days of Hope* rather than print my own limited couple of thousand words. Behind this particular example is the suggestion that *Screen* might usefully become deeply involved in, bring its particular perspective to bear on, areas which the film and television culture at large regards as important (eg the dominance of American capital in the British film industry and the aesthetic as well as economic consequences of this; the debate within ACTT on the issue of nationalisation and the lack of an aesthetic dimension to that debate: the Annan Commission and the future of television). To engage with such areas would begin the process of demonstrating *Screen's* relevance to many people seriously interested in film and television who – to judge by the remarks I hear in diverse film cultural contexts up and down the country – are presently unable to gauge *Screen's* relevance. It is not just pressure of time which makes me want to put my new copy of *Screen* on the bookshelf without reading it. It is the hard slog of getting through (virtually) unsigned terrain. What I sense the lack of in *Screen* is a concern to identify the kinds of changes it wants to see in discourse about film and television in Britain; the evolution of a strategy to bring those changes about – a strategy involving the identification of a key readership which must include but go beyond *Screen's* present university-based readership (virtually the only readership with the necessary ethos of cross-disciplinary concepts and discussion to make *Screen* accessible); the making of alliances with other progressive forces in British film and television culture; and a programme of ancillary work which goes far beyond the occasional weekend schools and events *Screen* has thus far embarked on. At the moment, the widely expressed difficulty of understanding

142 *Screen* dissuades self-reflexion in *Screen* and among those sympathetic to it, with the effect that the *Screen* position on the issues it engages with is *widely held to be* monolithic and unproblematic. This despite the fact that many articles are entitled 'Notes towards . . .' and/or are accompanied by qualificatory responses by other writers.

It is in this context that I want to look at *Days of Hope* in relation to a characteristic *Screen* text on realism, Colin MacCabe's 'Realism and the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses' (*Screen*, v 15 n 2, Summer 1974).

MacCabe purports to reveal a structure which he calls 'the classic realist text' which he suggests might be applicable both (primarily) to the nineteenth century novel and to the standard narrative fiction film. Interestingly, the 'classic realist text' is not defined – as popular belief would have it – in terms primarily of its subject matter, but as a formal structure 'in which there is a hierarchy amongst the discourses which compose the text'. This hierarchy is defined in terms of a dominant point of view, the narrator's, which is never revealed as *constructed* but is presented as *transparent* and *natural*, possessing knowledge and truth regarding the other discourses in the text and the world at large. 'Whereas other discourses within the text are considered as material which is open to re-interpretation, the narrative discourse simply allows reality to appear and denies its own status as articulation.' MacCabe's suggestion and his literary example from *Middlemarch* are extremely convincing, as indeed is his filmic example from *Klute*. MacCabe attempts to relate his model of the classic realist text to the cinema, concedes that it is much less easy than in literature to identify the dominant discourse, but suggests that it is to be found in the cinema in the narration of events. Thus, in terms of *Klute*, 'if a progression towards knowledge is what marks Bree, it is possession of knowledge which marks the narrative, the reader of the film and John Klute himself.'

I can follow the applicability of MacCabe's model to *Klute*; what worries me is its *general* applicability and, in particular, its applicability to *Days of Hope*. Certainly, from what we know of *Days of Hope* and from the published utterances of its makers, the process of narration itself is rendered transparent. What is not clear to me is that this confers *knowledge* and *truth*, of the order of a narrator in literature, on the organisation of the narrative. Nor am I certain that Philip, Ben or Sarah – the three principal 'characters' of *Days of Hope* – are privileged bearers of knowledge of the same order as John Klute.

A key suggestion in MacCabe's piece is that 'the classic realist text (a heavily "closed" discourse) cannot deal with the real in its contradictions and that in the same movement it fixes the subject in a point of view from which everything becomes obvious'. This is followed by a passage which must command a

There is, however, a level of contradiction into which the classic realist text can enter. This is the contradiction between the dominant discourse of the text and the dominant ideological discourses of the time. Thus a classic realist text in which a strike is represented as a just struggle in which oppressed workers attempt to gain some of their rightful wealth would be in contradiction with certain contemporary ideological discourses and as such might be classified as progressive. It is here that subject matter enters into the argument and where we can find the justification for Marx and Engels' praise of Balzac and Lenin's texts on the revolutionary force of Tolstoy's texts which ushered the Russian peasant onto the stage of history. Within contemporary films one can think of the films of Costa-Gavras or such television documentaries as *Cathy Come Home*. What is, however, still impossible for the classic realist text is to offer any perspectives for struggle due to its inability to investigate contradiction. It is thus not surprising that these films tend either to be linked to a social-democratic conception of progress – if we reveal injustices then they will go away – or certain *ouvrieriste* tendencies which tend to see the working class, outside any dialectical movement, as the simple possessors of truth.⁷

What seems problematic about this passage is MacCabe's assertion that the classic realist text is incapable of handling contradiction. In *Days of Hope*, there is a scene in which Pritchard, the gentlemanly Northern coal owner, lectures Ben and the three arrested Durham miners on the excellence of the British tradition of peaceful, gradual and constitutional reform while, in the background, the soldiers brought in to suppress dissent in the coalfield, indulge in bayonet practice. I am not clear how such a scene fails to handle contradiction in MacCabe's terms. Such a strategy is not uncommon in *Days of Hope* (the framing of a credulous populace with sheep; the intercutting of a quaker pacifist meeting with a jingoistic recruiting meeting, etc). What is certainly true is that contradiction is broached primarily at the most *obviously* structured moments of *Days of Hope*, at the points where it most *obviously* sheds its naturalist trappings.

At one point MacCabe mentions that 'the category of the classic realist text lumps together in book and film *The Grapes of Wrath* and *The Sound of Music*, *L'Assommoir* and *Toad of Toad Hall*'. My worry is that a category which does just that may be functioning at such a level of generality as to cast doubt on its operational usefulness. My hunch is that we must think in terms of Realisms and that a particular Realism will be progressive or conservative/reactionary not only to the extent to which its subject-matter is in contradiction with the dominant ideologies in that

144 society, but to the extent to which its formal strategies mark a departure from the dominant film or television discourses of that society.

I find both *Days of Hope* and the *Screen* position on Realism problematic in this respect. *Days of Hope's* realism involves the shedding of certain classical (primarily Hollywoodian) mechanisms and strategies, most notably the star and the dramaturgical device (most evident in the melodrama) of the climax. In almost every other respect *Days of Hope* retains the mechanisms and strategies of classical Hollywoodian narrative: eg linear construction; positioning of actors (in relation to the camera) to reveal mood and motivation; 'sculptural' lighting; heavy reliance on set decoration and costume. It is this massive retention of classical features which render it accessible and open it up to the charges of 'recuperation' (meaning something like 'absorption' or 'nullification', usually in a political context) which, I am sure, some of the writers in *Screen* would use to dismiss *Days of Hope* out of hand.

However, the fact is that *Days of Hope* (and previous Loach/Garnett work) does, by its shedding of certain features of classical realist narrative, set itself markedly apart from most other British film and television fiction, which arguably renders it in some respects progressive not only at the level of subject-matter but at the formal level too. That fact ought to have emerged in the public debate which followed the screening of *Days of Hope*, but did not owing to the lack of anything close to the *Screen* position being adumbrated and the incapacity of the major participants in that debate to articulate the problem.

This piece has emerged as even more tentative and uncertain than I would have liked. This is perhaps inevitable given my attempt to do many things: to mark the real intellectual strengths and advances of the *Screen* perspective; to point to what I see as defects in its practice and strategy; to resist posing *Days of Hope* as a chopping block for the (in my view) quite problematic *Screen* position on Realism; and to suggest (little more than implicitly) that the progressive realist text, such as *Days of Hope*, might be a more appropriate agitational weapon than the (utopian?) revolutionary text canvassed by *Screen*.

COLIN MCARTHUR

Colin MacCabe will respond to Colin McArthur's discussion in the next number of Screen.